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**Media in an emergent democracy: the development of
online journalism in the Kurdistan region of Iraq**

Karwan Ali Qadir SYAN

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School of Media, Design and Technology

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Media in an emergent democracy: the development of online journalism in the
Kurdistan region of Iraq

Karwan Ali Qadir SYAN

Supervisors: Dr Ben Roberts & Dr Mark Goodall

Key words

Media, Kurdistan region, online journalism, public sphere, democracy

Abstract

This thesis examines online journalism in the Kurdistan region of Iraq and its role in political debate in this emerging democracy. It also focuses on the role of the internet in the public sphere, explores the historical context in which Kurdish online journalism has developed and compares mass media in the Kurdistan region to that in other newly democratic countries, in addition to the mass media landscape, human rights conditions and political system in the Kurdistan region and Iraq overall are explored.

Data has been collected through in-depth interviewing of journalists, both independent and affiliated with political parties, as well as media academics and other educators. Moreover, as a case study, a qualitative thematic analysis has been carried out on opinion articles in online news sites to search for key themes and messages published and explore the limits of free discussion online.

The thesis argues that although there are many barriers to media work and freedom of expression, online journalism in the Kurdistan region is an alternative tool for expression and constitutes a better medium for promoting freedom of speech than mainstream media outlets. It then suggests recommendations for conducting further studies about the development and influences of online journalism and social media on Kurdish society.

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Romanization system for Kurdish language

A. Vowels:

Kurdo-Arabic Alphabet	Romanization	IPA : International Phonetic Alphabet
ا ، ئا	a	[a:]
ه ، له	e	[ɛ:]
(no marks)	i	[ɪ]
و ، و	u	[u]
وو	û	[u:]
ۆ ، و	o	[o]
ی ، ی	î	[i:]
ێ ، ی	ê	[e]

B. Constants Characters

Kurdo-Arabic Alphabet				Romanization	IPA: International Phonetic Alphabet
Alone	initial	medial	final		
ب	بـ	بـ	بـ	b	[b]
پ	پـ	پـ	پـ	p	[p]
ت	تـ	تـ	تـ	t	[t]
ج	جـ	جـ	جـ	c	[dʒ]
چ	چـ	چـ	چـ	ç	[tʃ]
ح	حـ	حـ	حـ	ĥ	[h]
خ	خـ	خـ	خـ	x	[x]
د	دـ	دـ	دـ	d	[d]
ر	رـ	رـ	رـ	r	[r]
ړ	ړـ	ړـ	ړـ	rr (ř)	[r]
ز	زـ	زـ	زـ	z	[z]
ژ	ژـ	ژـ	ژـ	j	[ʒ]
س	سـ	سـ	سـ	s	[s]
ش	شـ	شـ	شـ	ş	[ʃ]

ع	عـ	عـ	عـ	'	[ʕ]
غ	غـ	غـ	غـ	ḡ	[ɣ]
ف	فـ	فـ	فـ	f	[f]
ڤ	ڤـ	ڤـ	ڤـ	v	[v]
ق	قـ	قـ	قـ	q	[q]
ك	كـ	كـ	كـ	k	[k]
گ	گـ	گـ	گـ	g	[g]
ل	لـ	لـ	لـ	l	[l]
لّ	-	لّـ	لّـ	ll or (lʔ)	[lʕ]
م	مـ	مـ	مـ	m	[m]
ن	نـ	نـ	نـ	n	[n]
و	وـ	وـ	وـ	w	[w]
ه	هـ	هـ	هـ	h	[h]
ی	یـ	یـ	یـ	y	[j]

This table has been adapted from: Library of Congress 2012; Thakston 2006; Hassanpour 1992, Pp. 42-43.

Glossary of Abbreviations

CM	Change Movement
CMC	Iraqi Communications and Media Commission
CPA	Coalition Provisional Authority
CPJ	Committee to Protect Journalists
ICPKB	Kurdistan branch of Iraqi Communist Party
IHEC	Independent High Electoral Commission of Iraq
IMN	Iraqi Media Network
KIG	Kurdistan Islamic Group
KIU	Kurdistan Islamic Union
KJS	Kurdistan Journalists Syndicate
KRG	Kurdistan regional government
KRP	Kurdistan regional presidency
KSDP	Kurdistan socialist Democratic party
KSM	Kurdistan Socialist Movement
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisations
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
PDK	Kurdistan Democratic Party
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
WADI	Association for Crisis Assistance and Solidarity Development

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This thesis argues that although there are many barriers to media work and freedom of expression, online journalism in the Kurdistan region is an alternative tool for expression and constitutes a better medium for the public sphere than mainstream media outlets. It also argues that many common barriers to media work, with those in other new democratic countries, impede media work in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. This chapter aims to introduce and highlight the overall structure of the current research. It presents an outline and background of the Kurdish political situation, in addition to the development of the Internet and Kurdish media, particularly post 1991. It also introduces the main research questions of the thesis, the aims of the research, the methods used in the research, the limitations of the study, and an outline of the research structure.

1.2 Background

Iraqi Kurdistan, which is an emerging democratic region, was liberated from the Ba'athist regime's suppression due to a popular uprising in March 1991. Subsequently, the Western coalition forces imposed a no-fly zone on the region; USA, the UK and France imposed this no-fly zone on some Kurdish areas ostensibly to protect the people from Saddam Hussein's reactions. Later, a number of democratic processes, such as general elections took place in the region and for the first time in its history, a Kurdish local parliament was founded (Katzman, 2010 p. 1-2). The most prominent progress for the Kurdish region during this period occurred within the media field. A prosperous era began for the Kurdish media in which tens of territorial TV outlets, radio stations and periodicals were launched across the various cities and districts in the region. It should be noted that many of these media channels were guided by different political parties and their policies across the region. Moreover, the Kurdish parliament issued a publication law in 1993 with the sole purpose of regulating the press; this law also removed censorship, which was affecting the issuance of periodicals.

The civil war, which ran from 1994 to 1997, had a severe and significant effect on the semi-democratic process, which caused major setbacks across the Kurdish region (Katzman, 2010 P. 2; Rubin, 2008; Cockburn, 1996). The media was also negatively

affected by the war and their presence significantly declined. However, after the civil war ceased, to a certain extent the mass media in the region also prospered: for example, the Iraqi Kurdish first satellite channel was established in 1999. In addition, a number of independent periodicals were founded in the early 2000s; this was alongside the emergence of a limited number of online news sites and newspapers.

The subsequent downfall of the Ba'athist regime in Baghdad in 2003 was a significant turning point, not only for the political and social dimensions of the Kurdish region, but also for Kurdish mass media. For example, the international economic embargo was lifted on Iraq – this allowed Internet companies to invest in the region and new mass media technologies were brought into Kurdish territories. This evolution brought with it many new Kurdish satellite television stations, with different ownerships from the ruling parties, opposition parties and even the private sector. Many new radio stations and hundreds of new periodicals came into circulation. Most importantly, for the purpose of this thesis, a considerable number of online mainstream websites were developed.

The Internet, as a new mass communication technology and form of journalism, emerged in the late 1990s in the Iraqi Kurdistan region, and this thesis argues that it has played an important role in developing Kurdish media, especially in terms of creating more opportunities for the exercise of freedom of expression and further participation in the political process. It is often argued that the Internet transcends some of the classical censorship and authority controls that traditional media experience (Ang and Nadarajan 2013; Curran, 2012, p.8-12). It has also been argued that this new outlet of mass media has supported freedom of expression in emerging democracies through providing an affordable forum for different views and attitudes (Zittel, 2004, p. 79; Curran, 2012, p. 13; Perez, 2004, 136-137; Murdoch 2006). In fact, the expansion of the Internet in the Kurdistan region now means that a relatively large proportion of people use it on a daily basis to acknowledge and to participate in debates about topics of common interest. In fact, more than 20% of the 5.3 million of the total population of the Kurdistan region use the Internet, which is considered a higher proportion compared to the rest of Iraq (Internet World Status, 2015; PUKMEDIA, 2014; Xendan, 2014). Scholars such as Sheyholislami have argued that the Internet has played a significant role in enhancing the media field in the region (2011,

p. 90). This new situation for the Kurdish media occurred as a result of the development and expansion of Internet services through more investment in this field by local and foreign companies in the aftermath of 2003. In addition to its impact on the mass media sector, its development has affected the political process and the application of human rights in different ways across the region. The development of the Internet has brought serious debate amongst journalists, politicians and even ordinary citizens within the Kurdistan region concerning the role of this type of media in various aspects of Kurdish society, in light of the growth of online journalism in providing news and information.

It is the growth of online journalism which forms the subject matter of this thesis. This thesis concentrates on the influence of online journalism on freedom of expression in the region and identifies the most common barriers to this form of journalism and of the media overall. This work will also examine key concepts such as the network public sphere, freedom of expression, online journalism, and media in emerging democracies. It will contribute to an understanding of the realities which are, and which have, affected the Kurdish media, and addresses the ways in which online journalism in the Kurdistan region has been affected in terms of its features and constraints.

The researcher was interested in this topic due to his personal experience of working in a variety of Kurdish media channels, especially daily newspapers and television programmes, and in different positions such as a reporter, news editor, editing secretary and vice editor in chief. This has enabled the researcher to observe closely the development of the Kurdish media, including online journalism, which is an increasing trend in journalism among Kurdish journalists and audiences. This experience highly motivated the researcher to choose the topic of this research.

1.3 Aims of the research

This research has the following primary aims:

- 1- To examine the role of online journalism in enhancing freedom of speech in the Kurdistan region.
- 2- To explore the most common barriers to online journalism in the Kurdistan region.

- 3- To develop knowledge of the situation of the Kurdish media by exploring their different types of media, including broadcast, print and online sources, during the past and present, in order to determine the historical context in which Kurdish online journalism has developed.
- 4- To explore the relationship between online journalism and the public sphere.
- 5- To compare the Kurdish situation to that in other emerging democracies in order to identify common features and differences.

The researcher chose the topic of this study due to his personal experience and work background. He worked for different types of media channels and in different positions for almost fifteen years, in roles such as reporter, editor, deputy editor-in-chief and editing secretary for media channels including: Kurdish daily *Kurdistanê Nwê* (new Kurdistan) newspaper (affiliated to the PUK); Kurdish daily *Aso* (horizon) newspaper (classed as shadow media); Kurdish weekly *Beyanê* (morning) newspaper (independent); Arabic bi-weekly *El-Wîlaye* (the state-classed as shadow media) and for GK TV (Gelî Kurdistan- people of Kurdistan), to name just a few. In addition to his contribution, in both Kurdish and Arabic, to various newspapers and magazines, he also started writing for online news sites in 2002. Furthermore, the researcher has eight published books in Kurdish and Arabic, six relating to journalism, including: *Editorial* (published in Arabic in 2012), *Specialist Journalism* (published in Kurdish in 2007), *Techniques of Journalism* (published in 2004 in Kurdish) and *Freedom of Speech in Partisan Journalism* (published in Kurdish in 2002).

Being a professional journalist in this field for such a long period of time, and in so many different positions with varying types of media outlets, while also being an academic, means that the researcher as an insider was in a position to closely observe and notice the development and issues relating to Kurdish media in general. This background and the experience of the researcher highly influenced the key questions of this research. Especially since the researcher noticed several aspects of Kurdish media that need to be studied and explored for their significance to Kurdish society on one hand and due to a lack of studies in the area of the chosen topic on the other hand. The researcher found that study of the development of online journalism in the Kurdistan region, which has dramatically changed and affected the media situation,

and exploration of the main features and barriers of Kurdish media, was a challenging and interesting topic for the researcher to study. Particularly since journalism and media in general play a significant role in countries and societies that are in transition to democracy in many ways; for example, they can play the watchdog role as an important function in the process of democratization through founding techniques that hold political leaders accountable and responsive to the people. Besides, the media are “actively taking part in the process of democratization by shaping the orientations and actions of other participants” (Voltmer, 2006, p. 5). In such society, media outlets are important in forming people’s attitudes towards new political systems:

In a situation where citizens lack any lasting experience of the working of democracy and where existing agents of socialization, such as political parties, churches and political mass organizations, have lost credibility, the media’s performance might be of crucial importance in shaping the way in which citizens think about the new political regime (Voltmer and Schmitt-Beck, 2006, p. 199).

For this purpose, primary data was collected through conducting in-depth interviews with the most relevant persons to the topic of the study between July and September 2013. Moreover, a thematic analysis was conducted on opinion articles published from 30th June to 14th July 2013 on awene.com, an online news site, as a case study. Whereas for the quantitative data, the researcher continued to collect data from March 2012 until September 2014, so the data from the study is up to date.

It should also be noted that the experience and work background of the researcher had a significant role in enabling him to easily conduct fieldwork through gaining access to situations and enabling direct and easy contact with participants. It also enabled interviews to be conducted with the different pertinent groups, including partisan and independent journalists working for mainstream news websites and other traditional outlets, and media academics and trainers in the Kurdistan region. Moreover, the researcher’s experience and involvement in this area also helped in gaining information on different mainstream news websites, traditional mass media, the process of media production and other aspects. In general, it offered the researcher an important opportunity in terms of the data collection process and the correction and evaluation of the data.

1.4 Research questions

The main objectives of this research are to explore the effects of online journalism on freedom of speech in the Kurdistan region, identify the most common barriers to online journalism in this region and investigate how the Internet helps in creating and transforming the public sphere and people's participation. As such, the principal research questions of this study can be stated as follows:

- 1- What does the content of Kurdish online news sites tell us about the role of online journalism in Kurdistan?
- 2- What is the attitude of journalists, teachers and legislators to online journalism in the region?
- 3- What is the historical context in which Kurdish online journalism has developed?
- 4- How does the Kurdish situation compare to that of other emerging democracies?
- 5- What can the Kurdish example contribute to a wider understanding of the role of online journalism in the public sphere?

1.5 Methodology

The methodology chapter will explain in detail the rationale for the choice and use of each of the research tools in this thesis. As detailed in this chapter, the methodological approach of this current thesis project is a case study, which has been underpinned by theoretical propositions and a wide range of literature pertinent to the topic. In particular, theories that focus on the Internet as a medium for a networked public sphere and participation, and those that focus on media in emerging democracies. Another analytical strategy used in this case study is a descriptive framework developed for arranging the case study systematically. For this, the researcher collected a lot of data about the historical aspect of Kurdish media and its landscape, in addition to using and analysing a wide range of essential statistical data from secondary sources, such as official, professional and academic reports and documents. These steps were taken to answer questions 3, 4 and 5.

Furthermore, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with independent and political parties' affiliated journalists working for mainstream news websites and other traditional outlets, in addition to media academics and trainers in the Kurdistan region,

in order to provide a unique academic study and to answer research question 2. Primary data from these interviews is also used to underpin the investigation of various aspects of Kurdish media, in particular online journalism and its barriers and influences on the freedom of expression and people's participation in political debates.

The case study of this current thesis examines opinion articles published on the independent *Awêne* (mirror) online news site (Awene.com) relating to extending the presidential term in the Kurdistan region. The researcher resorted to the use of a qualitative thematic analysis of the content of these opinion articles. The findings from the thematic content analysis of these opinion articles, which reflect the extent to which people are allowed to express their critical opinions as a crucial element of freedom of expression, are all used together with related contextual information, including theories, historical and contemporary developments and the impact of online journalism from a wide range of secondary evidence sources. It should also be noted that observations of the Kurdish media have helped the researcher in gaining information on mainstream news websites, traditional mass media, the process of media production and other aspects (this will be discussed in more detail in the methodology chapter).

1.6 Pertinence of the subject

The impact of new mass media communication technologies on promoting freedom of expression in developing countries is an important theme. The invention of the web and online websites, and their adoption since the 1990s, has affected participation opportunities and free speech for media outlets, their staff and for ordinary citizens. It has been argued that the Internet, and online journalism in particular, have many features that enable them to play a significant role in the democratisation process, including interactivity, convergence, personalisation, speed and targeting and others (Dimitrova and Neznanski, 2006; Galley, 2000, p.41). These characteristics provide an opportunity for overcoming, to a large extent, censorship. Therefore, online journalism is unique in that it constitutes an important forum for professional journalists and politicians as well as ordinary citizens. It is thought that it has helped to generate the growth and expansion of political information by providing new channels which exceed the expectations of traditional media (Davis, 2010, p.106). Additionally, the interactive potential of the Internet increases the opportunities for citizen participation, as

citizens are privy to dialogues about issues of common interest. As such, “the Internet offers the possibility for every individual to be his/her own broadcaster at almost no marginal cost. Networks empower users to communicate their ideas to one recipient or to [the] general public” (Noveck, 2000, p.28-32).

Nevertheless, it has been argued that online journalism and the Internet in authoritarian regimes and emerging societies are capable of great influence in terms of confronting and exceeding the barriers to freedom of speech; as such their impact in the process of democratisation is much greater than in developed democracies. Ferdinand (2000, p.176) states that “Possibly the impact of the Internet has been greater in authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes”. He further argues:

As a means of communication, it has the potential to revolutionize political activity far more profoundly than the telephone or television ever did, for unlike them it offers the possibility of direct two-way interaction between the citizens and politicians. This has led to predictions that it will completely revolutionize government and democracy, even that the outcome will be a new wave of democratization world-wide, as authoritarian regimes find it difficult to survive and as established democracies are transformed (2000, p. 1)

In emerging democracies, where the general trend is toward improving the freedom of speech for the press, there are still threats to journalists, even if they are supported by press laws and a culture striving for free speech, as these societies are still fragile (LaMay, 2001). As I will argue here, online journalists strive to cope with the problems that impede the progress of freedom of speech and democracy in emerging democracies. It is therefore important to study the development of Kurdish online journalism, because Kurdistan is an emerging democracy in the Middle East, which is at the forefront in overcoming barriers of corruption, threats to human rights and social injustice (to be discussed in detail in Chapters Four and Five).

There is a shortage of academic literature on this subject and my comprehensive review of the existing academic literature shows that, there is currently no similar research studying the development of online journalism in the Kurdistan region through examining its role in enhancing freedom of speech, its common barriers and its relation with the public sphere. There is limited literature on other aspects of online journalism. For instance, *Kurdish Identity, Discourse, and New Media* by Jaffer Sheyholislami (2011) is one study that focuses on the impact of new media on Kurdish

identity and discourse. Sheyholislami, in his study, examines the effects of new media, in particular satellite broadcasting and online journalism, on Kurdish society. He addresses in detail the influences that online journalism and satellite TV have had on the Kurdish identity and discourse in terms of reviving the common history, construction of common national symbols and building a Kurdish common language. In addition, he examines the promotion of Kurdish language through websites and other features of online media such as communication and participation in debates about public subjects among Kurds from the diaspora and from Greater Kurdistan. He provides an overview of the features of Kurdish online websites, and their roles in informing Kurdish audiences throughout the world about news events in Kurdistan and elsewhere. He also examines the proliferation of the Internet in the Kurdish territories in Turkey, Iran and Syria and argues that censorship poses a threat to Kurdish Internet users, either through state control or by the hacking of their websites and accounts:

Kurds from Turkey and Iran and Syria, in particular, have often reported suffering from this state practice of curtailing freedom of expression. On April 6, 2004, Index Online reported that “two Kurdish language news websites based in Germany—www.amude.com and www.qamislo.com—which provide news, pictures, and video clips of demonstrations by the country’s Kurdish minority, were banned by the government of Syria in mid- March” (Sheyholislami 2011, p.176).

Other literature examines different aspects of online journalism in the Kurdistan region. For example, *Kurdish Electronic Journalism* by Hamasalih (2008) is a study that focuses on the features of Kurdish online journalism. Likewise, another study entitled *Kurdish Electronic Journalism: Forms and Methods of Designs* by Mh̄yed̄in (2012) focuses on the technical aspects of Kurdish online news sites. Moreover, *The Role of Online Journalism in the Formation of Political Trends of the Lecturers of the University of Sulaymaniyah* (2012) by Remezan, is another study that discusses the political role of Kurdish online journalism, and its function among university lecturers in the formation of their political attitudes. The contribution of this current thesis is to broaden our understanding of Kurdish online journalism and its impact on freedom of speech, in addition to its barriers and relations with the public sphere by examining the broader context of media and the Internet in emerging democracies. As such, it also contributes to changing the landscape of media in general in the region.

1.7 Contribution to knowledge

Whereas other existing studies examine Kurdish online journalism in terms of its role in Kurdish identity and discourse, the formation of political attitudes among Kurdish university lecturers, and the forms and design methods, the current thesis will examine the development of online journalism in the Kurdistan region as an emerging democracy. It explores its impact on freedom of speech, identifies the most common barriers to this type of journalism, examines its relation with the public sphere and compares the Kurdish media situation to that of other new democracies. This thesis then contributes in the following areas:

- 1- The topic of this study is unique and relatively new for the Iraqi Kurds. There is limited literature on this topic; this thesis will therefore provide further exploration and investigation into the impact of online journalism on freedom of expression in the Kurdistan region, the obstacles of media and in particular online journalism, and the role of media in new democratic societies – and its barriers.
- 2- It will contribute to raising the level of the current debate on the importance of the Internet and online journalism, as the role of journalistic work continues to transcend censorship and barriers by allowing true freedom of speech in the region.
- 3- It will demonstrate the notion of the public sphere and how this can be affected through the Internet in the Kurdistan region, which is a unique subject so far.
- 4- It will contribute to a greater understanding of Kurdish journalism and its role in society, for both international readers who are interested in Kurdistan, and for Kurdish journalists and media experts.
- 5- It will contribute to a greater understanding about Kurdish media, especially since the fall of the Ba'athist regime in 2003.
- 6- This thesis will also contribute to raising the awareness of Kurdish media history and its features in the past and present.
- 7- Finally, debates will be raised about concerns over the roles of partisan and non-partisan journalism in the Kurdish region.

1.8 Limitations of the study

It is valuable to note that when studying a significant topic such as the one of this study, some limitations and challenges will no doubt face the researcher. For instance, since online journalism is relatively new to the Kurdistan region, this field suffers from a lack of sources and academic works, as such further efforts are needed to collect information and data for the study from the Kurdistan region.

Moreover, the primary and many of the secondary sources used in the thesis were in the Kurdish or Arabic language, thus the researcher also had to carefully translate the information and the quotations from the transcriptions of the interviews, the content of the opinion articles of the case and from the secondary sources to English. In such a process, some unintentional mistranslation could occur, despite the researcher's efforts in being accurate and highly careful.

Another limitation is that during writing up the thesis much information needed to be updated, especially as the Internet is a new technology, and the political situation and the media in the Kurdish emerging society is continuously changing.

Furthermore, although the online news site, which was chosen as a sample for the case study because it is one of the most influential and busiest sites among the Kurdish independent mainstream news sites, examination of one online news site could limit the results' ability to be generalised to other online news sites. In the same way, as the analysis of the opinion articles focused on a specific time period and subject, the findings of this perhaps could not be generalised overly to other periods and subjects.

1.9 Review and outline of the PhD thesis

This thesis consists of nine chapters:

Chapter One outlines the background of the thesis with a general overview of the major questions, aims, pertinence and significance of the study, including the methodology, contributions to knowledge, limitations and an outline of the study structure.

Chapter Two focuses on the development of the Kurdish media beginning with a description of the Kurdish language, identity and literacy. The origins of the Kurdish media, its development and features through various phases are also presented in this chapter. Moreover, the mountainous and clandestine press as an alternative media for the Kurdish people will be detailed. It also offers an overview of the current situation

and landscape of various media types in the Kurdistan region providing in the meantime a historical background of each media type. Then, the Kurdish media in the diaspora, as an important part of the Kurds' struggle for achieving their national aims, will be considered. This chapter is particularly long (19,976 words), because it is the first review in English about the Kurdish media that uses such a breadth of sources and data to describe this subject in so much detail. In particular, a discussion of the Kurdish clandestine media in comparison to other covert media in Europe, and the study of different types of Kurdish media and the exploration of its development in the past and present has not been documented elsewhere in such detail.

Chapter Three involves a discussion of the research's methodology. It addresses the research methods adopted in this study and identifies and justifies the strategy, the methods and sampling strategy that were used to examine the development of online journalism in the Kurdistan region and to achieve the aims and objectives of this research in general. This chapter also outlines some main differences between qualitative and quantitative research approaches.

Chapter Four identifies and explains the major political transitions and changes affecting Iraq's political situation and its media developments. It also explains how the state controlled its media outlets prior to the coalition invasion in 2003. Besides, this chapter explains how the media situation in Iraq is directly linked, historically, to the political situation in the region. The political situation of Iraqi Kurdistan, which as an autonomous region created in 1991 has experienced many difficult phases, will also be considered. Various subjects will be explained in this chapter in an attempt to provide a better understanding of the Kurdish media and any problems it is facing; in particular, the following subjects will be considered: human rights, minority rights, the situation for journalists and freedom of speech within this region.

Chapter Five involves a discussion of the media in the emerging democracies. This chapter explores the many problems affecting new democratic societies. It also discusses the important role of the media in the democracy and how this is more difficult in countries that are making the transition to democracy. In order to provide more understanding, the features and problems affecting the media in Russia and Ukraine will be examined. This chapter also provides a comprehensive understanding of the different aspects affecting the current media situation in the Kurdistan region,

specifically concerning the prominent controversial problems and impediments concerned with journalists and local and international human rights, and media organisations.

Chapter Six of this thesis will examine the theories relating to the public sphere and the Internet's potential for being a better medium for people participation. It focuses on the notion of the public sphere and seeks to address the existing arguments, its types and elements. Moreover, it focuses on the role of the Internet as a medium for the public sphere, democracy, and freedom of speech, and it looks at the public sphere in the Kurdish society and the role of the Internet in this regard.

Chapter Seven focuses on online journalism. This chapter addresses the concept, characteristics, and different types of online journalism websites. It also provides an analysis of online journalism in the Kurdistan region in terms of its features, types, services and ownership. Additionally, it will describe independent media in the Kurdistan region and explain the most common barriers that face online journalism through the perspectives of the journalists who work in this field and media academics and trainers who also are experienced in this field.

Chapter Eight examines the role of online journalism on participation in the political debate and freedom of speech in the Kurdistan region through online journalism. This chapter constitutes three parts. In the first part, definitions, the nature of freedom of speech, the role of the Internet in underpinning it, and the international and local charters and regulations for protecting the rights to freedom of speech are provided. The second part is devoted to discussing the interviewees' perspectives on the role of online journalism in enhancing freedom of speech, and the third part is a thematic analysis of the sample of critical opinion articles published on *Awêne* online news site.

Finally, in Chapter Nine, the thesis concludes with a summary and several recommendations for further future studies.

Chapter 2: The development of Kurdish media: Past and present

2.1 Introduction

To understand the situation of the Kurdish media it is essential to explore its different types, including broadcast, print, and online in the past and present in order to determine the historical context in which Kurdish online journalism has developed.

Kurdish media has experienced difficult conditions since its emergence and as a result of harsh political, economic, cultural and social circumstances that have been imposed over the Kurds by external powers in the last few decades. Consequently, it can be said that the Kurdish media, in general, has different features and characteristics not only in terms of its style and quality, but also in terms of the content on which it has tended to focus on for the gaining of national rights, the highlighting of injustice against the Kurdish people, improvements needed in educational levels, as well as other national issues that have given this region's media its special characteristics. Therefore, this chapter will identify the different stages that the press has experienced within Kurdish society in order to highlight the core features of the Kurdish media as it has developed from its beginning to its current state.

This chapter is devoted to introducing the most prominent media phases in the Kurdistan region. The main characteristics and facts will be identified in order to clearly illustrate how this sector in Kurdish society has emerged and has since developed. Firstly, this chapter will address, in detail, the publication and maintained supply of the first Kurdish newspaper, by focusing on the newspaper's goals, the speech used, the manner in which it has been distributed, as well as any other aspects that appear to be of relevance. The chapter will then aim to identify the most prominent phases of the Iraqi Kurdish media and its characteristics by focusing on and mentioning some of the most notable newspapers, magazines, radio stations and television programmes and channels that have emerged during each phase.

Furthermore, this chapter will outline the historic turning point of the Iraqi Kurdish media, in the aftermath of the popular uprising of March 1991, which contributed to accelerating the improvement of the Kurdish media by paving the way for the foundation of a considerable number of media channels, not only in the printed form

but also in terms of broadcast and online media. This great historic event for the Kurds, which occurred as a result of the Ba'ath party's defeat in the Gulf War in 1991 (by the Western Alliance which was led by the USA), affected every aspect of people's lives. This event led to a quantum leap for the media, on all levels and across all measures. It is important to examine these aspects of the Kurdish media, in the past and present, since it has an impact on the contemporary press in the Kurdistan region in form and content. Besides, it describes developments in Kurdish society especially in terms of literacy and politics as to some degree the press reflected social reality.

2.2 The Kurds: Identity, language and literacy

The Kurds are an ancient and distinct group of individuals that live in the Middle East, in the most western part of Asia. The land which is inhabited by the Kurds is called Kurdistan (the land of the Kurds) and it is considered to be the motherland of the creation of writing by many ancient civilizations and early well-educated societies. The area of Kurdish lands has varied considerably throughout history, as a result of invasions, migrations and deportations (Ghassemlou, 1965; Hassanpour, 1996). According to Hassanpour (1992), Kurdistan encompasses the north-west of Iran, the north of Iraq, the north-east of Syria, the south-east of Turkey, as well as the most western part of Armenia which is located near the border with Turkey (see Figure 1).

There are no accurate statistics for the total number of Kurds in the world; therefore, their population size, with the exception of the Kurds in Iraq, is based on estimations. The newest estimation shows that the Kurdish population is somewhere between 25 and 30 million. It is widely believed that nearly half of this population live in Turkish Kurdistan, this number is deemed to be representative of almost 20% of the total population of Turkey; whereas, in Syria it is believed that there are approximately 1.7 million Kurds (The New York Times, 2012). In Iran, according to UNPO (2008a), some of the estimates show that the Kurdish population ranges between eight and 11 million, which represents between 11% and 15% of the total population of Iran. In contrast, in Iraq, which has a population of roughly 32 million, there are more than 6 million Kurds, which represents approximately 20% of the total population of Iraq. Furthermore, of this number, almost 5.3 million Kurds are believed to live in the Kurdistan region, which is ruled by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), whereas the remaining Kurds are thought to live in the other Kurdish territories that are located

outside of the KRG administration (Xendan, 2014; The New York Times, 2012; Aswat Al Iraq, 2011).



Figure 1: Map of Kurdish areas in the Middle East (The areas marked in dark brown are inhabited by the Kurds)

Source: Voice Of America (2012) <http://www.voanews.com/content/iranian-kurds-fight-discrimination-hope-for-change/1549125.html>

One of the most influential tools which has played a significant role in the Kurds' battle to protect their own identity and their battle to be recognised as a distinct nation is in their own unique language (Kreyenbroek, 1992, p.68). In many sources concerning Kurdish history, such as Ghareeb (1981) and Chaliand (1980) it is claimed that the Kurdish language belongs to the Indo-European group as it split from the Persian language in ancient times. The Indo-European languages, as a family, are composed of English, Persian, Russian, the Romance languages (which derived from Latin), Greek and Hindi; in contrast, the Semitic languages include, for example: Arabic, Hebrew and Akkadian (Polk, 2005, p.18).

Whilst the common language of Kurdistan is Kurdish, there are several dialects that are used by the Kurdish people across the different regions and areas of greater Kurdistan.¹ Hassanpour (1992), Yildiz (2004) and Kreyenbroek (1992) state that the biggest Kurdish dialect is *Kirmancî* which is spoken by the Kurds in Turkey, in some former Soviet Union republics, the northern part of Iranian Kurdistan, by all of the Kurds in Syria and by the people who live at the north of Iraqi Kurdistan (north of the Great Zab River). The second principal Kurdish dialect is *Sorani*, which is spoken by Kurdish people in Iraqi Kurdistan, south to the Great Zab River, and by the people in

1 - Since Kurdistan is divided into many parts, the term greater Kurdistan is used to refer to all of these parts.

the mid Iranian Kurdistan (Yildiz, 2004; Mahmoud, 2006). Figure 2, below, shows areas of main dialects in Kurdistan.



Figure 2: Map of major Kurdish dialects areas in Greater Kurdistan
Source: Centre for Kurdish studies http://ggautierk.free.fr/e/icem_96.htm

In terms of the written Kurdish language, it is similar to all of the other Muslim nations because it has been significantly influenced by the Arabic language – the language of the Holy Quran; therefore, until the 1920s, Kurdish was only written in the Arabic-Persian alphabet. Although there have been many efforts by Kurdish intellectuals, in Iraq, to Romanise their alphabet, they remained attached to a country ruled by Arabs where their compulsory cultural life was in Arabic, so they resorted to creating the Arabic-Kurdish alphabetic which is known as the Kurdo-Arabic alphabet (Blau, 1996). Nowadays, Kurdish can be written in a number of different scripts according to the language of the dominant nation/country to which they are attached. To illustrate, Blau (1996, p.23) states that the Kurds write in three different ways:

Today Kurdish is written mainly in three scripts: Arabic, Latin and Cyrillic. All three systems use diacritical marks to represent the phonemes peculiar to Kurdish. The effort to Kurdicise the Kurdish language by removing all formal and lexical borrowings from the dominant languages is to be credited to the authors of the period 1920-60.

Consequently, the Kurds in Iraq use the Kurdo-Arabic alphabetic (Arabic alphabetic with some modifications to adapt to the Kurdish language) in Kurdish writings. In contrast, the Kurds in Turkey, who represent the majority of the Kurdish population in greater Kurdistan, use Latin alphabetic since the Turkish written language is in Latin, whereas, the Kurds in Iran write in the Arabo-Persian alphabetic, and the majority of

Kurds in the former Soviet Union republics write Kurdish in Cyrillic. To illustrate further:

Under the influence of modern Turkish, northern Kurds started to write Kurdish in the Latin-based alphabet whereas southern and eastern Kurds (from Iran and Iraq) continued to use an Arabic-based alphabet. Iraqi Kurds, following Arabic, started to call Austria Nemsâ, but Kurds from Iran, following Persian, called the same county Utrîsh. Whereas the former called a car seyare, the latter called it mashe'n, and those from Turkey called it Araba. In addition to vocabulary, the grammar and even writing style of Kurdish started to be influenced by the dominant official state languages in the region. Because the Kurds, especially Kurds who were being ruled by different states, could not communicate with one another easily for almost a century, they had no effective means of articulating and sharing discursive identity constructs (Sheyholislami 2010, p. 292).

Since Kurdistan has been occupied by the Ottomans and the Persians, who had strict policies toward their minorities which prohibited them from even speaking in their own languages, it was not possible for them to have their own educational institutions as any efforts in this direction were faced by repressive procedures. Therefore, Kurdish literacy and education was not taught in their own academic schools or institutions (as there were no such facilities), but instead education began in the form of foreign languages. Hassanpour (1996, p.48) acknowledges that literacy amongst the Kurds began in Arabic in the 17th century, after the Islamic conquest in this area and since the practice of the Islamic religion required understanding in the form of Arabic:

In the religious schools which were established in mosques to train mullahs,² Arabic was the medium of instructions, and much later some Persian was also taught. Like Medieval Europe, where Latin was the language of religion and the state, Arabic assumed a shared character as the Language of Allah.

These religious schools had an effective role in providing education and learning amongst the Kurds. Many of those who were taught to read and write in these schools, later became intellectuals, poets or historians who effectively participated in recording and drawing the Kurdish identity and its history; for example, poets like Melayê Cîzî (1570-1640), Hacı Qadrî Koyî (1816-1897) and others, were taught at these religious schools. Nonetheless, the Kurdish languages have evolved slowly, due to the many constraints imposed upon them. Blau (1996, p.22) links the development of the

2 - Mullahs are Muslim clerics.

Kurdish language to the allowance of its use by the various authorities in Iran, Turkey, Iraq and Syria; to illustrate:

The development of the Kurdish language and the Kurd's literacy productivity within the Middle East have since depended on how much freedom each of these four states has been willing to grant their Kurdish minority (Blau, 1996, p.22).

2.3 Printing in Kurdistan

In general, the printing process did not arrive in the Islamic nations as quickly as it had in other parts of the world because these Islamic nations were living in the shadow of the Ottoman Empire. To explain this further, Eñmed (1978) states that because of illiteracy and a general lack of awareness of the people in these regions, as a result of the severe policy of the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, who imposed the death penalty on anyone involved in the printing processes in the 15th and 16th centuries, the printing process in these nations developed much later when compared to the European nations who invented the printing machine. It was only when the importance of printing became clear for the intellectuals of the Ottoman states during the 17th century, that many of them sought to import printing machines. There were still many difficulties and constraints placed on printing, but these intellectuals managed to make great strides, especially in the printing of books, which paved the way for the emergence of the press (Eñmed, 2005). In the 19th century, the Ottoman government itself sought to establish printing presses for the purpose of printing documents. Thus, for the first time in the second half of the 19th century, a printing machine actually appeared in the city of Bitlis. Hassanpour (1992, p.170) points out that this printing press was established between the years of 1865 and 1866, this was followed by another printing press in Diyarbakir a couple of years later. Then, after another decade, the government established a new printing press in Van city.

Nonetheless, prior to this period, in Mosul city, the Dominican missionaries founded a printing press in 1855, this was followed by a government press in 1881; whereas, in Baghdad, a printing press was setup in 1820, this was followed by several other printing presses up to the beginning of the 20th century ('Elî, 2011; Hassanpour, 1992, p.170). The printing press, which was brought to Kirkuk city in 1879, in the era of the Ottoman occupation, is considered to be the first printing press in the Kurdish territories in Iraq. This printing press was bought by Feyzî Paşa, the son of Husên Paşa,

and it was called *Wîlayet*. This printing press was allocated to the printing of formal government papers before it was moved to the city of Mosul. Then, in 1909, another printing press was brought to Kirkuk, but it was later moved to Baghdad. Two years later, in 1911, another printing press (*El-Ĥewadîs printing house*) was brought to the city by Eĥmed Medenî, who was an intellectual from Kirkuk (Şerîf, 2005, p.193; Ferec, 2005).

After the end of the Ottoman occupation, and with the advent of the British forces, Kurdish printing in the Kurdish territory in Iraq continued to emerge as they set up a printing press in Sulaymaniyah city in 1920. According to Hassanpour (1992, p.171), this printing house was owned by the British authorities; however, it was first used for printing a Kurdish newspaper entitled *Pêşkewtin* (progress), and it was later used for printing government papers, many books and other periodicals. Moreover, in 1926, the first Kurdish private printing press was established in *Rwandiz*, in Erbil province, by Ĥusên Ĥuznî Mukiryanî who was a Kurdish intellectual. Mukiryanî named his printing press *Metbe'ey Zarî Kirmancî* (Kirmancî Dialect Printing Press); it was an outdated machine, but it was still used to print 23 books, despite the Kurdish magazine of *Zarî Kirmancî* only lasting from 1926 to 1930 (Hassanpour, 1992, p.173). In the period which followed, until 1991, less than 10 private and government printing presses were founded in the major Kurdish cities, including in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah. This number remained small for a number of reasons: firstly, as a result of instability across the Kurdish regions, despite strict government censorship and surveillance; and, secondly, because of the high costs associated with establishing printing presses.

2.4 Origins of the Kurdish press

Prior to the emergence of their press, the Kurds made a number of efforts in the printing process and in the field of literature. To illustrate, Eĥmed (2004a) states that many Kurdish intellectuals and poets had written books on poetry, history and folklore in Kurdish, including: Mewlana Xalîdî Neqîşbendî (1779-1827), Sheikh Ĥuseynî Qazî (1791-1870), Mela Meĥmudî Bayezîdî (1799-1867), and more importantly Şerefxanî Bedlîsî (1543-1599) who wrote, in 1597, his famous book *Şerefname* which documented Kurdish history – this book is considered to be one of the oldest Kurdish printed books (see Figure 3). According to Hassanpour (1996, p.59) and Eĥmed (2005, p.103), poetry is deemed to represent the initial Kurdish literature, whereas prose is

considered to be the essence of Kurdish journalism since the Kurdish poets, novelists and historians have all played an essential role in creating and sustaining Kurdish journalism throughout the 20th century. Furthermore, many of the newspapers and magazines have published various other types of literary products including poetry, novels and short stories (Hassanpour 1996, p.59).

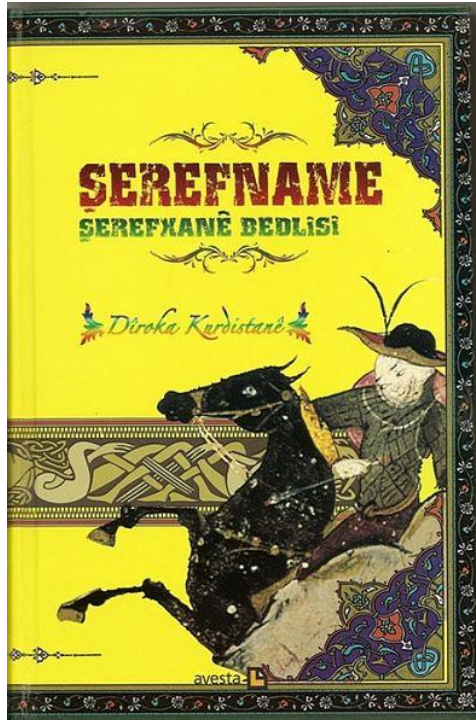


Figure 3: The front cover of Şerefname

It has been argued that the Kurdish printing process began outside of Kurdistan; for example, the Kurdish press emerged outside of Kurdistan by Mîqdad Mîdhet Bedrxan who was a Kurdish intellectual refugee in Egypt. Hassanpour (1996) also argues that in general not only the press but also the printing process in the Kurdish language began outside Kurdistan. To illustrate, every single Kurdish book or Kurdish publication published during the Ottoman Empire was printed either in Istanbul, Cairo or Baghdad. As Hassanpour (1996, p.54) further claims, the majority of Kurdish books that were located in Iraq between 1920 and the late 1970s were printed outside Kurdistan, mostly in Baghdad:

Between 1920 and 1977, 47.2% of books were published outside Kurdistan, mainly in Baghdad (45.2%), which indicates the poor state of printing in the area.

This can be explained by the fact that no heavy censorship existed in Istanbul or Cairo, compared to that which existed in the Kurdish territories governed by the Ottomans. Furthermore, most of the Kurdish nationalist intellectuals, who were interested in

issuing publications, were in exile and, finally, the printing presses were generally owned by the government, who managed to prohibit the use of the Kurdish language in its printed form.

There is no doubt that the initiation of any nation's press process has its own history and individual characteristics that differentiate it from other regions; but, it is this history which, in the case of Kurdistan, has been influenced by many factors, including: social, political and economic aspects. According to Eħmed (1978), the Kurds were not only exposed to the internal factors of illiteracy, lack of experience and awareness, but to a large extent they were also exposed to many external factors which affected the late emergence of their press, especially in terms of the prevention of use of the Kurdish language for public talks, the media or for academic purposes, by the governments in Istanbul, Tehran, Baghdad and Damascus.

The 1820s witnessed the birth of the first newspaper within the Ottoman Empire. This newspaper was issued in Izmir city in 1825 but it was in French; the first Turkish newspaper *Takvim-i Vekayi* (Calendar of Events) was printed in 1831; this represented a vital step for other nations within the Empire who became aware that they could start their own press, just like the Turks (Eħmed, 2005).

The harsh political and economic situations affecting the Kurdish people, as well as the high rate of illiteracy amongst them, as a result of the previous centuries which had caused their absence of independence, had inadvertently influenced cultural and education aspects as well. Therefore, as is obvious, the issuance of the first Kurdish periodical came much later than for their neighbours. For instance, the first Arabic periodical was printed in 1828 in Cairo, the Turkish *Takvim-i Vekayi* was published in November 1831 in Istanbul, the first Persian periodical/newspaper of *Kaħez Exbar* was published in 1848, and the first Arabic newspaper published in Iraq in 1869 was called *Elzewra*.³ In contrast, the first Kurdish periodical was not issued until the latter years of the 19th century (Hassanpour, 1996, p.56; 'Elî, 2010). The emergence of the Kurdish press historically goes back to the *Kurdistan* newspaper that was issued on 22 April 1898 by Mîqdad Mîdħet Bedrxan⁴ in Cairo, which was far from his home land because

3 - Elzewra is one of the names for Baghdad.

4 - Mîqdad Mîdħet Bedrxan was the son of Bedrxan Beg, the leader of Bottan revolt which was against the Ottomans. They were expelled by the Ottomans to Egypt and he completed his education in Europe.

the powers were semi-autonomous from the Ottomans authorities and they prohibited printing and publishing of any kind of Kurdish publication (Fwad, 2005; Van Bruinessen, 2000; Hassanpour, 1992; Eħmed, 1978).

Due to the difficult conditions experienced whilst issuing the first Kurdish newspaper, it is worth noting some of the main features, goals and reasons which were imposed on the owner to issue it in a foreign country. First of all, the *Kurdistan* newspaper was in the Kurdish *Kîrmancî* dialect and it was supposed to be a bi-weekly publication (Hassanpour, 1992). It was published on four pages (25.5cm by 32.5cm), it utilised Arabic letters and had a circulation of 3,000, most of which were distributed free-of-charge across Kurdistan areas (Rojbeyanî, 2008). Nevertheless, the Kurdish readers were not easily able to get hold of the newspapers, nor were they able to read it in public, because it was prohibited by the Ottoman officials and if they were caught with or reading the newspaper then they would be sent to jail (Hassanour, 1996). The most remarkable noteworthy point about this newspaper was that only six issues were printed in Cairo and after continuous harassment and prosecution by the Ottomans, the owner was forced to move to Geneva where he printed and published a further 13 issues of the *Kurdistan* newspaper. The owner then returned to Cairo to print the 20th to 23rd editions, he then travelled to London where he printed the 24th edition of the newspaper and he then moved to Folkestone, a small town to the south-east of London where he published five issues. The final two editions of the newspaper were published after a forced journey to Geneva in 1902 where issues 30 and then 31, the last issue of the newspaper, were published (Fwad, 2005; Mstefa, 2008). Figure 4, below, shows the front page of the *Kurdistan* newspaper, the first Kurdish newspaper and its owner.



Figure 4: The front page of the *Kurdistan* newspaper, the first Kurdish periodical and the owner Mîqdad Mîdhet Bedrxan

The *Kurdistan* newspaper had many national objectives and goals to achieve. Emîn (2001) believes that the newspaper's main goal was to oppose the Ottoman tyranny by motivating the Kurds to educate themselves for their own interests in order to promote relations with the Armenians and to encourage the Kurds to take an interest in their Kurdish history, literature and language in order to encourage publishing and the taking of action towards better literacy and finally to work toward the promotion of a national consciousness. This newspaper was published away from the Kurdish territories for a number of reasons. Eħmed (2005) and Van Bruinessen (2000) explain that under the repressive rule of the Ottoman Sultan, who prohibited freedom of speech, it was too difficult, especially for non-Turkish people, to issue their own newspapers. However, despite the Sultan's aggressive attitude towards non-Turkish people, he was motivated to have good relations with Cairo and he encouraged a mix of European cultures, which, as Hassanpour (1996) points out, meant that the control and censorship from the central government of the Ottoman Empire was much less effective in Cairo itself.

The period which followed the closure of the *Kurdistan* newspaper, did not see any other Kurdish newspaper emerge until 1908 during the Young Turkish Revolution, which ended the suspension of parliament and began a new era of constitutional rule. During this new era, which did not last long, the first Kurdish political society of *Kurt Teaviin Ve Terakki Cemiyeti* (KTTC) (Kurdish Solidarity and Progress Society) was founded, they issued a newspaper entitled *Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (KTTG) in Istanbul and a number of Kurdish intellectuals contributed to this. Then, in 1913, the first Kurdish magazine of *Rojî Kurd* (Kurd's Day) was issued in Istanbul by the *Hivî-ya Kurd Cemiyeti* (Kurdish hope society) ('Elî, 2010). Moreover, on 19 September 1913, another Kurdish magazine, entitled *Yekbûn* (Unification), was published in both Kurdish and Turkish (Eħmed, 1978).

During this time, the press movement in Iranian Kurdistan had emerged. According to Eħmed (1978) and Hassanpour (1992), in March 1914, and for the very first time, a Kurdish newspaper entitled *Kurdistan* was issued in the Kurdish city of Sabilax, and only a few issues of which were published (no further details are known about it). During the period of the First World War, no other Kurdish newspapers or magazines were released in Iranian Kurdistan; but, during the revolution that was ignited in the

region by Simko Shikak, a Kurdish newspaper entitled *Rojî Kurd Şewî 'Ecem* (The Day of the Kurds-The Night of the Ajams) was issued in 1921 (Ehmed, 1978).

2.5 Clandestine press: The voice of Kurdish nationalism

Before examining the Kurdish media in more detail, it is important to firstly identify and study the prominent events and conditions that the Kurdish people have witnessed and been exposed to, over time, in order to provide more information about their history – it is likely that this will also help to provide further understanding of the media conditions affecting the Kurdish people. Furthermore, nationalist consciousnesses, as well as ethnic issues, have stimulated a shift toward a print culture, which has helped to progress Kurdish writing traditions in general. To illustrate, Hassanpour (1996, p.58) believes that the press has helped the Kurdish liberation movement in many aspects, stating that:

Politically, the press helped the transition from traditional, feudal-tribal leadership of the nationalist movement to a modern, political party organisation. Political organisations would gain credibility or legitimacy if they published a journal.

The history of the Kurdish press and its journey through more than a century is linked to the Kurdish National Liberation movement. Interestingly the growth and decline of the press is strongly linked to the struggles experienced by the Kurdish people. The Kurds and their revolution and liberation movements have strongly influenced the press and they have even contributed to building the basics which have allowed for the emergence of the press. Many of those who contributed to the liberation movements, during the 20th century, have also struggled to set up printing presses for the production of Kurdish periodicals. Therefore, it can be said that the Kurdish press has emerged, developed and flourished as the Kurdish movements and parties, with their own cultural, political and military struggles, have gained initial rights to protect their own language and identity. Moreover, many of the Kurdish revolt leaders sought to gain printing presses, as they believed that printing could be used as an efficient and dynamic instrument to unite the nation whilst also increasing the literacy of the nation's people (Hassanpour, 1996).

The Kurdish press in Iraq has had a turbulent life as it has progressed through many stages as a result of the unstable conditions in Kurdistan and Iraq, in general (Fethwallh, 2007). These stages are associated with various political movements and

the denial of political and cultural rights of the Kurds by different governments in Baghdad. This has led to many revolts and insurgencies from the Kurds. As a result, and despite the late birth of the Kurdish press in Iraq, many press movements have been of low quality and have only been short lived. In addition, a foundation was set up for the Kurdish press by the national liberation movements that were struggling to create an independent or self-governing region. They relied on journalism as an important and active instrument to help nation- building and to support their struggle. Eħmed (2005, p.229) argues that the Kurdish cultural and literary situations are strongly linked to the political and armed movements. Most of the Kurdish revolt leaders have been interested in issuing publications in order to present their messages to the people, whilst also showing the people that they have also ignited a civilised and liberal revolution (Zamdar, 2004). For instance, Simko Shikak ignited the rebellion in 1919 in the Iranian Kurdish territory, he then sought to issue a publication which would support his revolts; however, he did not achieve this goal until May/June 1922 when he issued the first Kurdish publication in Iranian Kurdistan which was entitled *Kurd* (Zamdar, 2004).

Due to the unstable circumstances present throughout the 20th century, between Baghdad and Kurdish political and armed movements, all of the publications issued by the Kurdish parties and nationalists were prohibited; therefore, they resorted to clandestinely printing and publishing documents and the clandestine establishment of radio stations. Salħ (2004) states that since the Iraqi government did not allow the Kurdish parties or organisations to have their own media channels to express their views and demands freely, they, therefore, had to work covertly to achieve their goals.

Clandestine journalism includes journals, newspapers and other publications, which are issued and published in secret by Kurdish political parties, organisations, groups and even by individuals that oppose the Iraqi central government's policies. These publications were often handwritten or printed using modest printing machines that were of low quality (Salħ, 2004). Salħ (2004) further explains that as a result of the Iraqi government's strict policy against the Kurdish political movement and their activities, the Kurds resorted to working underground by relying on old printing machines. As a result, these publications were usually of very low circulation, low quality and their length did not usually exceed eight pages. Moreover Eħmed (2005, p.42) determines a number of important characteristics of the Kurdish clandestine

press, by stating that most items were handwritten, printed in difficult circumstances and it was difficult if not impossible to preserve or archive these publications because of the government's strict policy. Furthermore, most of the clandestine publication readers were asked to destroy the publication once it was read to avoid repercussions if caught with it. Finally, it should be noted that the number of writers of these publications were few and their publications were therefore few and their circulation was low.

During the 20th century, the Kurds in Iraq issued many clandestine newspapers, magazines, pamphlets and books, whilst also launching several radio stations in opposition to the authority's repressive policy (see Appendixes 1 and 2). The majority of these clandestine channels were launched in the mountainous area of Iraqi Kurdistan, since this area was beyond the reach of the Iraqi army as it was under the control of the Kurdish Liberation Movement. Nevertheless, as El-Bettî (2011, p.9) notes, the mountainous clandestine press played a significant role during that period by organising and strengthening the link between the revolutionary party organisations and the people by awakening the people in these Kurdish towns and cities to the Kurdish revolution fighters and leaders who were located in these mountainous areas.

From 1914, the year when the first Kurdish periodical was published in Iraq, to March 1991, where a part of Iraqi Kurdistan was freed after a popular uprising, almost 433 periodicals, in the form of newspapers, magazines and pamphlets, were printed. This was either by the Kurds themselves, the British mandate, Iraqi governments or foreign country ambassadors in Baghdad, and they were also in various languages. The majority of these periodicals were printed and published in secret; to illustrate, Figure 5 displays the publishing status of Kurdish periodicals between 1910 and March 1991. The high proportion of Kurdish clandestine press items, shown in this figure, illustrates the extraordinary circumstances and difficult conditions that the Kurds have struggled through in order to freely express themselves and issue publications.

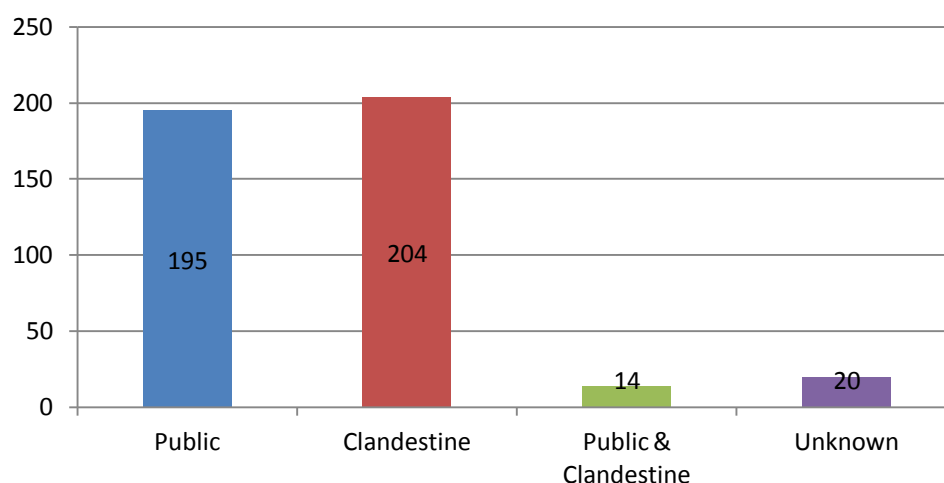


Figure 5: Publishing status of Iraqi Kurdish periodicals from 1910 to March 1991, in Iraq

Overall, the Kurdish underground press either inside the cities or what was circulated in the mountainous areas, has a significant influence on contemporary media in the Kurdistan region. For example, nowadays, many of the media outlets, TV stations, periodicals, radios and online newspapers, especially those that belong to the political parties, have almost the same policy and work style with the underground press in the last century. They mainly focus on reporting about issues of nationalism, partisan activities, praising the parties' leaders and commemorating the tragedies of the Kurds. Moreover, as in the clandestine or mountainous press, the political parties still have many periodicals for different segments of society, whereas many of the contemporary periodicals are extensions to previous periodicals circulated covertly in the Kurdistan Region in the last century. Besides, the Kurds deprivation from a free and open press for a long period is one of the major reasons that led to the current chaotic evolution of media in the region in general. For example, by the end of 2014, there were more than 750 magazines, newspapers and other periodicals registered by the Kurdistan Journalists Syndicate (KJS) and circulated in the Kurdish cities and towns (Emîn, 2015), despite plenty of local TV and Radio stations, and many of them are of poor quality having professional and technical problems (Wanî, 2012). According to Huşyar (2006) horizontal expansion and technical visualization has not yet become a qualitative development at the professional level of Kurdish journalism and they are still captive to old journalistic traditions especially as they are opinion press in general, just like the Kurdish press in the last century, before being news press.

Not only in Kurdish society was this model of press wide spread, but also many western countries have witnessed it during and in the aftermath of World War 2.

According to the Netherlands State Institute for War Documentation (1994) during the Nazi's rule over Germany and its occupation of the Netherlands and France, particularly between 1940 and 1945, despite the presence of severe penalties, hundreds of underground publications, newspapers, magazines, pamphlets and bulletins were issued and distributed covertly by the opposition and resistance groups. These publications carried out many tasks mainly facing and criticizing the Nazi's repressive policy against the people of these countries and its occupations and dominations over Europe overall. Furthermore, the resistance groups relied on such press as an important means of communication, people awareness and informing them with the latest news of the war and their activities. Widely known clandestine newspapers in that period such as *VRIJ NEDEDERLAND* (the free Netherlands) which appeared in August 1940, *HET PAROOL* (the password) in August 1941, *DE ORANJE KRANT* (the orange paper) in 1942, *GEUZENACTIE* (Beggars' Action) and *BULLETIN* in 1940 and others, had an essential role to provide a forum for the opposition and to maintain resistance against the Nazis.

Both the underground press during the Nazi rule over Germany and some European countries and the Kurdish underground press in Iraq share some points. For example, the Kurdish clandestine press was stressing on national rights and for freedom, ending the war on Kurdistan, putting an end to repressive practices by the authorities against the people, demanding political pluralism and democracy. Similarly, the covert press during the Nazis struggled for freedom, rights of the people, ending the war and the Nazi occupations of Europe and for democracy. Besides, both presses faced severe prosecution by the authorities.

Besides, in the Nazis' prisoner camps this style of press was the main source for the prisoners to stay informed with the latest news of the war and the resistance activities outside their detention camps. The prisoners themselves released news bulletins in risky circumstances to inform other prisoners in the camps with news and information about the war collected from: German newspapers and magazines that were brought to the camps, new prisoners who had fresh news, radios and the camp's loudspeakers that broadcast the Nazi's proclamations about the war. A good example for these prisoner's publications is a bulletin entitled *POW WOW* (Prisoners of War Waiting on Winning) which was in three languages and issued daily (Stalag Luft 1 Online, 2005).

Likewise, in the UK, underground press appeared but in different periods and for different purposes. In the 1960s, several periodicals were issued to reject the prevailing culture. This press model was focusing on the life style in society especially publishing beliefs about counter-culture.⁵ These underground periodicals were issued by many free insiders illegally and faced many procedures from the police (British Library 2012). According to Nelson (1989) the history of the British clandestine press goes back to October 1966 when for the first time an underground publication entitled *International Times* was launched and later followed by many others such as *Oz*, *Friends* (later became *Friendz*). Nelson (1989) describes the goals and the policies of these underground publications and their roles in creating a dialogue in the community and promoting a counter- culture at that period as follows:

The underground press functioned in many ways. It was designed to both serve and promote the counter- culture community and its ideals. Although the 'news' and other articles presented through this medium were articulated by the seemingly committed intellectuals of the movement, the absence of a strict editorial policy- or any editorial policy at all- enabled a variety of often conflicting views and emphases to be expressed. In a very real sense, these publications have recorded a process of dialogue between the writers and the community, and as the opening quotation indicates, they have also recorded the various phases in the counter-culture's development and decline (Nelson, 1989, p. x).

From 1966 to 73, almost 75 underground publications were issued in the UK and many of them lasted for years such as *Oz* and *IT*. These publications relied on different forms and techniques in their attempts to deliver their messages and ideas to the readers such as articles, news, cartoons, comics and many others. Moreover, Nelson (1989) argues that the underground publications did not adhere to objectivity, as such:

Underground publications made no claims to objectivity and it was this perhaps as much as the different in language, style, colour and content, which distinguished the press in its own eyes from the hypocritical 'objectivity' of Fleet Street (Nelson, 1989, p.47).

5 - Milton Yinger the American sociologist defines a counter-culture stating that: "When a group of people begins to reject the major values of its society and attempts to replace these with an alternative set of values, many of which are direct opposites to those being rejected" (Spates, 1976, p.869)

2.6 Kurdish press: The development and main features

Kurdish journalism has played an effective role in awakening the national consciousness of the Kurdish people and calling for democratization throughout last century, despite contributing efficiently in expressing the Kurds' ambitions, publishing new knowledge, defending women's rights, eradication of illiteracy and many others (Huşyar, 2006). Thus, it is appropriate to determine the most prominent stages that the Kurdish media has progressed through as these relate to the great events that occurred in Iraq and Kurdistan. Examining these stages helps to understand the effects made by the Kurdish press in the past on media nowadays in the Kurdistan region on quality and quantity. There are five main stages, listed below, each of which will now be discussed in turn:

- 1- The birth stage
- 2- The British occupation and mandate (1918-1932)
- 3- The monarchy rule (Monarchical Iraq, 1932-1958)
- 4- The Republican Iraq
- 5- The golden era (1991 onwards)

2.6.1 The birth stage

Kurdish journalism began in Iraq roughly 16 years after the first Kurdish newspaper of *Kurdistan* was published. In particular, a Kurdish magazine entitled *Bangî Kurd* (The Call of the Kurd) was issued in Baghdad on 8 February 1914 by Cemaledîn Baban – a Kurdish intellectual. However, after merely five issues of the magazine, the magazine stopped publishing (Cebârî, 1975; 'Umer, 2001), as a result of the onset of the First World War and the deteriorating political situation across the entire region. According to 'Umer (2001), the absence of printing presses in the Kurdish *Vilayet* of Mosul, and as many Kurdish intellectuals were actually in Baghdad, led to the printing of the first Kurdish journal outside of the Kurdish territory; although, it was distributed across the Kurdish cities at the same time. This magazine was the only Kurdish periodical published in Iraq during the Ottoman Empire's domination over the three *Vilayets* of Iraq. This publication therefore leads to this event being considered as the birth stage of the Kurdish press in Iraq. From this period onwards, hundreds of Kurdish periodicals were issued for various different circumstances. To illustrate, Figure 6 shows how the

number of Iraqi Kurdish periodicals grew within the decades from 1910 through to 1990.

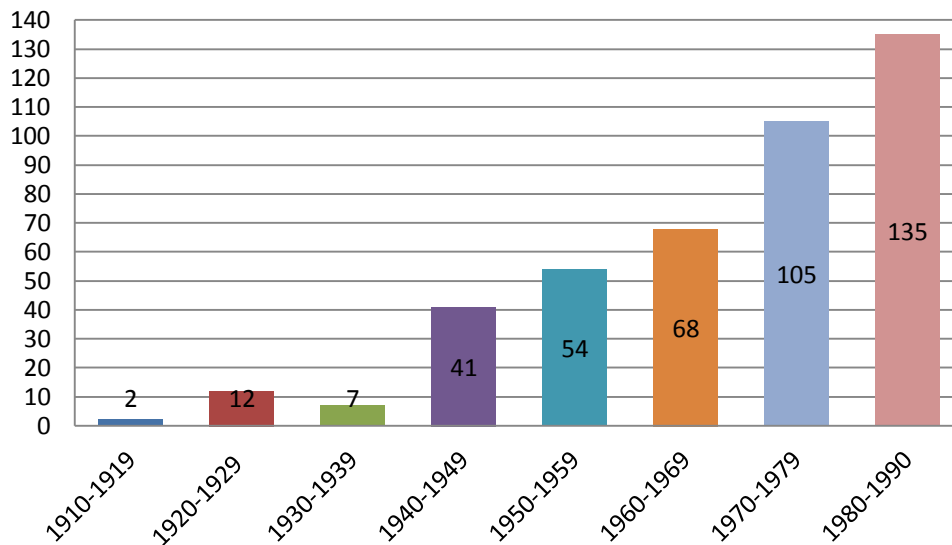


Figure 6: The development of Iraqi Kurdish periodicals, per decade from 1910 to 1990 in Iraq

2.6.2 The British occupation and mandate (1918-1932)

When the British forces entered Iraq, they sought to issue many publications for their own interests. According to Eħmed (1978), when the British began to expel the Ottomans in Basra *Vilayet* in 1914, they also quickly took control of the printing presses in the city and they published a newspaper entitled *Basra Times*. Later, in 1918, they issued the *Baghdad Times* and other journals in Arabic, English, Kurdish, Persian and Turkish, across the various cities, in an attempt to bring the people of these nations and regions on to their side. These publications explained the views of Britain and France towards Islam, they showed the terrible acts that had occurred under the Ottoman rule that were against the people of the region, and they also provided an update of news of their victories in the war and conflicts of that time (El-Bettî, 2011). In the aftermath, which included the expulsion of the Ottomans, under the British occupation of Iraq, a new atmosphere was created. The Kurdish press had a little more freedom; however, as Eħmed (1978, p.85) states, during the British occupation of Iraq, between 1918 and 1932, more than 200 newspapers and magazines were published, but only six of them were in Kurdish. Furthermore, these Kurdish publications were only released for short periods as the Kurdish press, in general during this period, was still facing many difficult situations. Hassanpour (1996, p.56) illustrates the harsh situation experienced during this period:

Even in Iraq, where the League of Nations monitored progress in implementing limited self-rule under the British mandate, the Kurdish press suffered from repression.

Hassanpour (1996) further explains that the Iraqi government and the British mandate authorities were both opposed to permitting the publication of a Kurdish daily newspaper, since they thought the existence of such Kurdish publications could threaten Iraq as it could increase national awareness amongst the Kurds. Therefore, throughout the monarchy rule and the British mandate over Iraq, the authorities did not formally permit any Kurdish political publications (Edmonds, cited in Hassanpour, 1996).

For the Kurds, the press field, like political life, had an unstable journey. 'Umer (2001, p.117) refers to many reasons for this unsettled situation; but, 'Umer clearly indicates that the government in Iraq had a narrow and restrictive policy of Arab nationalism, which disrupted the Kurdish. Even though the British were there to resolve the situation in Iraq, which was still unstable especially after the country had been reformed and the Kurds had been deprived from their own national state, they were there to support the Iraqi government and as a result, they fought the Kurds at different points. In addition, work in the press field was new for the Kurds as many of them were illiterate. Furthermore, El-Bettî (2011), believes that the Kurdish press was not only primitive, but it was also weak because of the following reasons: firstly, because of a lack of printing presses in the Kurdish cities; secondly, because of the high rate of illiteracy amongst the Kurdish; thirdly, because of lack of financial sponsorship to sustain the publication of periodicals, over a long period of time; and, finally, because of the absence of professional journalists within the field. It is worth noting that the vast majority of people who contributed to the issuance of the newspapers and magazines were either poets, novelists or historians (Hassanpour, 1992, p.256).

Nevertheless, the rebirth of the Kurdish press, during this period in Iraq and across the Kurdish territories, was primarily made by the British. Before the occupation of Mosul Vilayet by the British in November 1918, a Kurdish newspaper was issued in Baghdad entitled *Têgeyşitinî Rastî* (Understanding of the Truth); it was issued on the 1 January 1918 and aimed to encourage the Kurds to oppose the Ottomans (Ehmed, 1978; 'Umer, 2001). This newspaper was issued on a bi-weekly basis and 67 issues were published for just over one year (El-Bettî, 2011). The policy of this newspaper was

to show the grace of the Great British people to the Iraqi people, attracting Kurdish people to their side and praising Britain's role. For instance, the newspaper published in the first issue an article entitled (The grace of the Great Britain's government for Iraq) which was showing the suffering of the Iraqi people before the coming of the British to liberate them from the Ottomans. This article describes the British as a rescuer who had been sent by God to save the people from Ottoman's suppression and provide wheat and barley to the farmers. The article ends arguing, "Under the English rule over Iraq, we will spend a golden and silvery age" (Ehmed, 1978, p.114). In another article entitled (The England and the Islam) published on 13 May 1918, issue (28), *Têgeyşitinî Rastî* attempts to stir a religious sense of the Kurdish people stating that in history, Great Britain has helped the Muslims several times; it even rescued the Ottomans from the death only for the sake of Muslims (Ehmed, 1978, p.114). Moreover, *Têgeyşitinî Rastî* tried to present the detestable aspects of the Ottomans and attacked them on many occasions. In an article published on 25 March 1918, issue (21), *Têgeyşitinî Rastî* presents the damage that was made by the Ottomans to Islam arguing that the Ottomans have tried to weaken this religion and they have even changed and erased many of Islam's morals main keys (Ehmed, 1978, p.115). This newspaper published many reports and news about the war and the victories of the British and its allies around the world, but one notable point of its policy was its attitude towards the Kurdish people. In many articles, the newspaper describes the positive attitude of the English towards the Kurds. A good example of this is an article published in the newspaper on 2 March 1918, issue (18), which argued that "more than any other people, the English are friends to the Kurds and liked their courage because they have heard about Kurdish courage, therefore they love the Kurds very much". In another issue, *Têgeyşitinî Rastî* states that the English like the Kurdish people very much because they are famous and have a considerable name in the world and they should not be dispersed, promising to help them since the British came to liberate the Arabs, Kurds and the Armenians (Ehmed, 1978, pp.117-118).

After the closure of this newspaper, the British started to issue another Kurdish publication across the Kurdish territory from the 29 April 1920. The British had brought a small printing machine to Sulaimanyiah city. This press paved the way for the printing of many Kurdish publications and this event can be seen as a trigger to a radical shift in cultural and press life for the Iraqi Kurds, who had never previously had a printing

machine in their homeland (Remezhan, 2008). As a result of this, they began to issue a weekly newspaper entitled *Pêşkewtin* (Progress); this was the first Kurdish newspaper to be published in the Kurdistan region (Hassanpour, 1996). Eħmed (1978) claims that this newspaper was supervised by Major Ely Bannister Soane ⁶ and in total 144 issues were published, until 29 June 1922. Furthermore, despite the fact that the newspaper was in Kurdish, it was praising Great Britain with their leadership and their civilised role in the world, whilst also educating the local people on agriculture, health, economics and trade. This can be viewed as a significant milestone based on the essential role it played in improving Kurdish writing, since it was used for writing, publishing internal and external news, various articles and reportages ('Umer, 2001). For understanding the newspapers' policy well, it is better to present some of its article titles as follows ('Umer, 2001, p.78):

- 1- Sultan Sellahedîn and the Turks (Issue 8)
- 2- The English government, Persians, Turks, Russians and the Germans (Issue 9)
- 3- England and Islam (Issue 13)
- 4- What is the Britain, France, America and Italian's attitude towards the east nations? (Issue 18)
- 5- What should the Kurdish leader do? (Issue 19)
- 6- What is the difference between the English government and the Turks? (Issue 44)
- 7- The Turkish government been weakened (Issue 50)
- 8- Why the Turks government fight? (Issue 38)
- 9- Intellectual and national liberation (Issue 57)
- 10- The future of the world (Issue 62)

Both *Têgeyşitînî Rastî* and *Pêşkewtin* were issued and supervised by the British and had a significant influence on Kurdish journalism and writing systems in the future. According to 'Umer (2001, p. 79) both newspapers that were supervised by Major Soane, drafted many Kurdish new terms and concepts that are still used in the Kurdish

6 - Major Ely Bannister Soane (1881-1923) was a British political officer who was the political governor of Sulaymaniyah city in 1919. He was a writer and well informed about Kurdish culture and he wrote several books about the Kurdish language and the geography of Kurdistan such as *To Mesopotamia and Kurdistan in Disguise* in 1912 (for further details, see Academic 2013; 'Umer, 2001, p.110; Eħmed, 1978).

language in addition to promoting the Kurdish writing system. Furthermore, they formulated the foundation of Kurdish journalism, since for the first time in the Kurdish press both newspapers resorted to various journalistic techniques such as reportage and interviews in addition to publishing photos. Major Soane benefited from the British newspapers in many aspects especially in terms of journalistic techniques and design, to some extent. Thus, these two newspapers became the basis for many other periodicals that were issued in the following years in the Kurdish territory.

When Sheikh Mahmoud Barznji ⁷ returned to Kurdistan after his exile, a prosperous phase had begun for the Kurdish press as many new Kurdish newspapers were issued at this time. The short era of Kurdish self-rule, under the leadership of Sheikh Mahmoud, was effective in encouraging the Kurdish press during the period that followed and it initiated remarkable developments in intellectual movements (Xeznedar, 1973). According to El-Bettî (2011), 'Elî (2010) and Salîh (2003), during Sheikh Mahmoud's rule over the city of Sulaymaniyah, and even after his withdrawal from the city, four weekly newspapers were printed, all of which included political, social and literary information across four pages, each of which will now be listed.

1- *Bangî Kurdistan* (The Call of Kurdistan)

When Sheikh Mahmoud formed the government in Sulaymaniyah, the Kurdish newspaper of *Bangî Kurdistan* was published (Chaliand, 1994, p.52). The first issue, which acted as the mouthpiece of Sheikh Mahmoud's government was circulated on 2 August 1922. Seventeen issues were released until 8 June 1923 (Xeznedar, 1974). This newspaper was printed in Kurdish, Persian and Turkish ('Umer, 2001).

2- *Roj Kurdistan* (The Day of Kurdistan)

The first issue of this newspaper, which again acted as a mouthpiece for Sheikh Mahmoud's government, was launched on 15 November 1922, but it only lasted for around six months (Salîh, 2003). The final issue was printed on 3 May 1923. Sheikh

7 - Sheikh Mahmoud Barznji led the Kurdish revolt in 1919 against the British. The revolt was as a result of the Kurds being deprived from their rights during the occupation of Iraq. But, in July 1919, the British troops captured Mahmoud in a battle near Sulaymaniyah and he was sent into exile. After two years the British allowed him to return in order to use his rule against the Turkish influences on the region. He was quickly appointed by the British as a general governor, but his national ambition and his disappointment for the Iraqi British agreements for recognition of the Kurds' rights in Iraq, made him establish a Kurdish Kingdom in November 1922, at which time he proclaimed himself to be the King of Kurdistan (see Salîh, 2003, for more details).

Mahmoud and his partisans at this point left Sulaymaniyah and with them they took the printing press to *Jasana* cave in the *Sûrdaş* mountain ⁸ in an attempt to escape attacks and air bombardments from the British (Ehmed, 1978).

3- *Bangî Haq* (The Call of the Right)

This newspaper's life was much shorter than the others, because the British troops marched towards Sheikh Mahmoud's stronghold in the mountainous countryside which forced him and his partisans to leave the area ('Umer, 2001). The Sheikh was therefore only able to publish three issues between 8 March and 12 April 1923. According to Fwad (2001), this newspaper was the first newspaper to be launched by a Kurdish armed movement; therefore, it is a valuable document as it provides significant value and information to help with the understanding of the truth about Sheikh Mahmoud's revolution. Moreover, Ehmed (1978) claims that this was a semi-clandestine publication.

4- *Umêd Îstîqlal* (The Hope of Independence)

After the British army left the area, Sheikh Mahmoud returned to the city of Sulaymaniyah and issued another newspaper entitled *Umêd Îstîqlal*. This newspaper was launched by Sheikh Mahmoud's revolt supporters; it was issued in Sulaymaniyah on 2 September 1923 by a number of Kurdish intellectuals (Emîn, 2001) and, 25 issues were released until the summer of 1924 (El-Bettî, 2011).

These four newspapers were published in difficult circumstances and were only short lived; however, many Kurdish intellectuals such as Ehmed Hemedî Begî Sahebqirran, Sheikh Mhemedî Xallsî, Şukrî Fezlî, Cemîl Saîb, Ehmed Xwace, Refîq Hîlmî, Hüsên Nazm, Ehmed Fewzî, Ehmed Faîz, Bêxud, Reşîd Kaban, and Faîq Zêwer contributed to their issuance and they played a significant role in increasing national awareness amongst the Kurds. By recording historical events which represent an important phase of the Kurdish struggles they managed to focus on the main features of the Kurdish written system (Salîh 2003) (see Appendix 1).

With the aftermath of Sheikh Mahmoud's revolts and rule, and with the monarchy's power over the region in 1932, other newspapers and magazines appeared which were characterised by several distinctive characteristics. 'Umer (2001) believes that the

8 - *Jasana* cave is located in the *Sûrdaş* Mountain, 45 kilometres north-west of Sulaymaniyah city.

most prominent characteristic of these publications was that they were mostly in Kurdish despite the fact that the Kurdish literature milieu at that time used to be written in Turkish or Persian due to their cultural domination over the Kurdish language. Therefore, when the Kurdish periodicals were issued, besides Kurdish, they were devoting sections to Turkish and Persian languages. Moreover, their issuance periods grew longer than they had been previously because the region witnessed a sort of stability and the Iraqi government controlled the Kurdish territory permanently with the assistance of the British. Finally, the publications played a significant role in transferring Kurdish society during that era from an armed struggle to a civil struggle as the people of the region became more informed about national issues. Kurdish intellectuals believed that instead of military options, periodicals could be an effective means in their hand to demand for national rights and to implement many tasks such as promoting political and national awareness despite educating people and guiding them. Thus they work on this trend. Besides, the heavy British bombardment and attack on Sulaymaniyah, left considerable havoc in the city, which made its residents leave it for a couple of months. Because of this destruction and the new situation, a new belief appeared which preferred peaceful means for demanding the rights of the Kurdish people and self-determination so that may be more meaningful and avoid war from the Kurdish region. A good example for this trend is a newspaper, entitled *Jiyanewe* (Rebirth), which was first issued in Sulaymaniyah on 18 August 1924 (El-Bettî, 2011). It was a socio-political newspaper that was supervised and sponsored by the government, it was printed on a weekly basis by the city's municipality printing press, the final issue was circulated on the 14 January 1926, after 56 issues ('Umer, 2001). Many famous Kurdish intellectuals, novelists and poets contributed to the writing of this newspaper such as M. Nurî, 'Ewnî Efendî, Fayeş Zêwer, 'Elî 'îrfan, Kurdî, Kerîm Se'îd, Eħmed Tofîq, Meħmud Cewdet, 'Ebdulwahîd Emîn Rwandizî, M. Şewqî, Mistefa Wafî, Eħmed Muxtar, 'Elî Kemal, Bêkes, Kerkukî, Ĥacî Qadrî Koyî, (Eħmed, 2002; 'Umer, 2001, p. 121). *Jiyanewe* was criticising Sheikh Mahmoud and his partisans for the suffering and destruction that have fallen on the Kurds as a result of their military movement. In contrast, the newspaper was praising the British who helped the Kurds to get rid of the Turks and to have a better life ('Umer, 2001, p. 122). A week after the closure of *Jiyanewe*, a new newspaper – with almost the same policy and even a similar title emerged – this new newspaper was entitled *Jiyan* (Life) and was launched

on 21 January 1926. This newspaper had the longest life, when compared to the previous Kurdish periodicals, its final print was circulated on the 10 March 1938 after 553 issues (Ehmed, 1978). This newspaper is considered to be a valuable record of Kurdish literary and linguistic products. Many Kurdish intellectuals; poets, novelists, historians and other literate people such as Sheikh Nurî Sheikh Salîh, Mhemed Edîb, Cemîl Saîb, Reşîd Necîb, 'Ebdulla 'Ezîz, Faîq Zêwer, Pîremêrd, Fayege Bêkes and others contributed in writing to this newspaper (Emîn, 2002). This newspaper published news, articles and reports in various fields especially in politics, social issues and education in addition to literary criticism and poets. As an example, in the issue (61) on 14 April the newspaper published a report about exchanging the governors between Erbil and Sulaymaniyah according to an Iraqi government's decision. Moreover, the newspaper was published in April and May 1927 with several items of news about the Iraqi army's attack on Pênciwên town. Besides, in the issue (70) on 21 June 1927, *Jiyan* newspaper published an article about the negotiation between the British authorities in Baghdad and Sheikh Mahmoud. More importantly, the newspaper gave considerable attention to women and their rights in Kurdish society. For instance, on 29 July 1929, issue (189), in the newspaper, an article asked for equality between men and women because this will lead to integration and development of the Kurdish society. On 18 August 1927, issue (78), an article written by Mhemed Edîb asked for equal opportunities for girls just like boys to study and to be educated, otherwise the Kurdish people would be called a retarded people and there would be no equality between men and women. Moreover, on 24 May 1927 in an article written by Faîq Zêwer in the newspaper, the writer argued that women in Kurdish society have been deprived from their rights and they should be allowed to study. Concerning Kurdish history, it published many subjects, mainly translated articles from foreign languages. For example, in issues 156, 157 and 158 respectively, the newspaper published a series of translated articles about Kurdish history and archaeological sites in Kurdistan. Furthermore, in issues 184, 185 and 186, the newspaper published a series of a translated study on Kurdish history and its customs and traditions. Meanwhile, the magazine of *Diyarê Kurdistan* (Gift of Kurdistan) was issued on a bi-weekly basis in Baghdad. It was firstly issued, on 11 March 1925, by Salîh Zekî Sahebqerran who was a Kurdish intellectual, in three languages, Kurdish, Arabic and Turkish (Xeznedar, 1973). Only 16 issues of this

magazine were published because on 11 May 1926, when its owner joined the compulsory army, its publication was stopped ('Umer, 2001).

The *Kirkuk Newspaper* was first issued on 12 October 1926, it was initially printed in Turkish at the *Elhewadîs* printing house in Kirkuk city; but, in 1930 the Kurdish section was added to the newspaper and it was then also published in Kurdish ('Umer, 2001). Many Kurdish intellectuals and poets partook in writing this newspaper such as 'Ebdulxalîq Esîrî, Sheikh Selam, Eħmed Muxtar Caf, Mħemed Zekî, Eħmed Koyî, Hîcrî Dede, Pîremêrd, Nûrî Saîb ('Umer, 2001, p. 132). It had a much longer life than many publications and the final issue of the newspaper was circulated with a date of 20 August 1972; a total of 2,033 issues were printed and published on an intermittent basis (El-Bettî, 2011). Another Kurdish magazine, entitled *Zarî Krmancî* (Kirmanji Dialect) was launched on 26 May 1926; for the first time this was not in Sulaymaniyah or Baghdad, but in the Rewandîz district within the Erbil province. According to El-Kurdî (2010) and El-Bettî (2011), this was the first periodical issued in the Erbil province and, despite many obstacles imposed by the government, its publication continued for six years with 24 issues. The owner, Hûsên Hûznî Mukriyanî, was a historian and could speak and write in eight languages. He became a professional printer using an old fashioned printing press in the city of Rewandîz where he produced Kurdish letters and the printing of books about Kurdish history ('Umar, 2001). Finally, *Peyje* (Ladder) was another Kurdish magazine that was published in Baghdad in 1927; unfortunately, it only had one issue (Cebârî, 1975), but it was a literary and social magazine of 46 pages in length (for more information, see Appendix 1).

2.6.3 Monarchy (Monarchical Iraq, 1932-1958)

During the rule of the monarchy, which ended on 14 July 1958, there were no principal differences for the Kurdish press when compared to the previous period under the British mandate. According to Eħmed (1978, p.86-87), in 1932, Iraq gained its independence from the British, but no principal changes occurred for the press across Iraq. Like the previous period, it was difficult for the Kurds to issue any type of periodical or to freely express themselves in the written form; to illustrate, several Kurdish newspapers and magazines were closed as a result of criticising the government, including the *Rûnakî* and *Gelawêj* magazines. Eħmed (1978) further states that in the late 1940s a ruthless situation for the press began in Iraq. Furthermore, one

of the major problems, during the period of monarchy rule, was the lack of access to printing presses – this posed a real challenge and barrier to the improvement of Kurdish publications (Hassanpor, 1996). Nevertheless, during this period the Kurdish press played an important role in improving and progressing the Kurdish language, education and culture.

The first Kurdish publication published after the British mandate ended. The magazine entitled *Yadgarî Lawan* (Memories of Youth) was launched in 1933 by a group of young Kurdish intellectuals that belonged to the Youth Association – this was a Kurdish organisation that had been established in Baghdad (Cebârî, 1975). Murad (2011) notes that only two issues of this magazine were printed, the first in 1933 with the second and final issue being printed in 1934 in the name of *Diyarî Lawan* (The Gift of Youth).

In general, after the end of the British mandate on Iraq in 1932 and until the beginning of the republic system of Iraq in 1958, many Kurdish periodicals were issued. The most prominent periodical was *Jiyan* (Life) in 1939, this acted as a sequel to the *Jîn* (Life) newspaper; this newspaper is considered to be one of the most important Kurdish newspapers since it had such a long life and was continually printed until 1963 – it therefore played a significant role in increasing public awareness.

Another prominent publication was that of *Gelawêj* (Daystar) which lasted for nearly 10 years. This Kurdish magazine was first published on January 1939 in Baghdad and it was the most important and sophisticated Kurdish journal of this period. A considerable number of Kurdish writers and intellectuals from this era and from various fields contributed to writing and producing this magazine such as Pîremêrd, Salîh Qeftan, Hâmd Ferec, 'ebdulla Goran, Tofîq Wehbî, Faîq Bêkes, Mîhemmed Emîn Zekî and others. In addition to historical, educational, political and literary topics, the magazine published articles on anti-Nazism and anti- Fascism that were controversial and provided a great service in the fight against Nazi propaganda in Kurdistan and its influences on the Kurdish people (El-Bettî, 2011).

Not only Kurdish intellectuals and politicians contributed to the issuing of Kurdish periodicals, but the British and American embassies also published several Kurdish periodicals in Baghdad during monarchical Iraq. For instance, the public relations department of the British Embassy in Baghdad issued, on October 1943, *Dengî Gêtî Taze* (The Voice of the New World), which was a Kurdish socio-cultural literary

magazine that was part-written with the participation of many Kurdish intellectuals. It was published regularly and continually until September 1948. Moreover *Aga û Rûdawî Hefteyî* (Weekly News and Events) and *Peyam* (Message) were issued in 1949 by the American Embassy (Ehmed, 1978).

On 3 September 1946, the foundation of the Iraqi Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) was announced and they soon launched clandestinely their bi-weekly newspaper called *Rizgarî* (El-Bettî, 2011). This newspaper was produced until 1955, however, only a few issues were actually published. In the meantime, in 1955, the KDP issued another newspaper to replace *Rizgarî*, this was entitled *Xebat*; it was firstly published clandestinely, but after the revolution of July 1958 it became openly produced (El-Bettî, 2011).

Publishing clandestinely was a phenomenon in this period; the Kurdish organisations, parties and even most of the intellectuals resorted to issuing their publications in an underground manner. The Iraqi government at that period had strict and repressive policies towards any Kurdish political movements. As a result, Kurdish parties were not permitted and most of the periodicals criticised the government's policies and demanded Kurdish rights. Finally, these Kurdish periodicals had a remarkable effect on the people and they became a source of nuisance for the government; thus, the government prohibited the production of such periodicals and prosecuted the owners of them. Hence, the KDP, the Kurdistan Branch of Iraqi Communist Party (ICPKB) and other Kurdish organisations worked to create their publications clandestinely. For instance, the ICPKB, like the KDP, issued its central newspaper which was entitled *Azadî* (Freedom) in clandestine from April 1944. Many ICPKB leaders contributed to the writing of this newspaper, which aimed to raise national consciousness amongst the people by demanding rights for the Kurds (El-Bettî, 2011). Both the KDP and ICPKB issued many other periodicals, for the different classes and segments of society, in order to address students, farmers, teachers, women and others.

Many Kurdish newspapers and magazines were published both publically and clandestinely in the cities of Kurdistan and in Baghdad. Those that were issued in public were mainly individual efforts and they were generally funded or issued by the British or the American embassies. For instance, *Aga û Rûdawî Hefteyî* (Weekly News and Events) and *Peyam* (Message) were issued by the American Embassy and *Dengî*

Gêtî Taze (The Voice of the New World) by the British Embassy. Whereas, other periodicals were launched by local associations such as the *Hîwa* magazine (Hope), issued in 1957 by *Yaneyi Serkewtîn* (Victory Club), *Arbîl* (Erbil) was launched in 1959 by the Teacher's Association in Erbil city. Even the Iraqi government issued a few periodicals through the Kurdish cities municipalities and educational directorates, such as the magazine of *Êre Beşdaye* (This is Baghdad) in Baghdad in 1950 and the *Zban* (Language) newspaper in 1937 in Sulaymaniyah (Ehmed, 1978; Murad, 2011).

2.6.4 Republican Iraq (1958-1991)

This next phase witnessed many major political events for the Kurds in Iraq. After the military coup of 14 July 1958, which was conducted by a group of officers (Free Officers), the monarchy rule in Iraq ended and the new Republic of Iraq was announced. This republic allowed the Iraqi press to raise its overall level in both form and content. The Iraqi press developed in an important way, both intellectually and using different techniques. The newspapers started to use various styles for their news and articles and they also started to conduct more detailed research for their published items (El-Ke'bî, 2010). Hassanpur (1996) believes that the collapse of the monarchy rule in Iraq allowed the Kurds to enjoy a high degree of political freedom, despite the absence of modern printing presses in Kurdistan; furthermore, hundreds of Kurdish books, journals and newspapers were being printed by a few small, old-fashioned, hand-operated printing presses that existed in the Kurdish cities.

The Kurdish press, as well as the Arab press, prospered after this coup when many newspapers and magazines began to appear (El-Bettî, 2011). According to Hassanpour (1996), with the end of the pro-British monarchy system in Iraq, five daily newspapers were issued between 1959 and 1961. All of which had short life -spans, not lasting for more than a year. El-Ke'bî (2010, p.62-63) explains that this prosperous period for the Kurdish press did not last long, because in early 1961 the *Xebat* newspaper (Struggle) which was the central newspaper of the KDP began to criticise the administrative style of the Baghdad government which caused tension between the two sides. The newspaper identified many demands including the abolition of martial law in the country; the ending of the transition period of ruling; the need for free and fair general elections; the enactment of a permanent constitution; the releasing of Kurdish political prisoners; and, finally, the provision of more freedom for the press. In contrast, the

government responded with tougher procedures which included the shutting down of the party's headquarters in Baghdad and with it the closure of the newspaper as some of the party leaders were arrested. Furthermore, the next coup was conducted on 8 February 1963 by the Ba'athist party and the period which followed saw the closure of all newspapers and magazines by the new government (El-Salhi, 2008). As a consequence, the periodicals that were being issued by the Kurdish parties resorted to continue their publications clandestinely.

The difficulties and hard circumstances which followed led to the deterioration of the relationship between the KDP and the government of Iraq in early 1960s; furthermore, the Kurdish revolution broke out in September 1961,⁹ and then the Ba'athist regime came to power on 8 February 1963. However, in the aftermath of 14 July 1958, many Kurdish periodicals could again be published in public (Cebârî, 1975; El-Bettî, 2011). The most prominent newspapers were *Xebat* (Struggle), *Brayetî* (Brotherhood) issued by the KDP (sporadically at times), and *Azadî* (Freedom) issued by the ICPKB (Cebârî, 1975). The Kurds took advantage of this period and printed many periodicals and books, albeit, in some periods, due to the difficult economic situations or deterioration of the political conditions, some were either closed or continued clandestinely. For instance, *Rizgarî* (Deliverance) was a weekly political, literary and historical magazine that was issued in Baghdad as an organ of the KDP, firstly on the 10 February 1959, but it was only issued twice. *Rastî* (The Truth) was the first Kurdish newspaper that was issued in Mosul on 7 May 1959. A number of Kurdish intellectuals such as Cercîs Fetihulla, Enwer Mayî, Îhsan Muftî, Mes'ud Ketanî, Yusf Heyderî, Cgerxiwên and Mela Mehîmud Mistefa Yusfî produced this, but it lasted only until 3 April 1960, with only 24 issues – publications stopped as a result of harassment from the state. *Brayetî* (Brotherhood) was another Kurdish prominent newspaper that was launched by the KDP on 6 May 1967 in Baghdad, in the Kurdish and Arabic languages. Many other newspapers and magazines were issued during this period, including: *Raperrîn* (Uprising), *Aşitî* (Peace), *Rayî Gel* (The People's View), *Dengê Kurd* (The Voice

9 - The revolution of September 1961 was one of the biggest revolutions in Iraqi Kurdistan, it was ignited by the KDP under the leadership of Mustafa Barzani and it lasted until 1975 (for more information, see El-Xeyûn, 2008).

of the Kurd), *Rojî Nwê* (New Day), *Birrwa* (Principle), *Hewlêr* (Erbil), *Îraqî Nwê* (New Iraq) and others (see Appendix 1).

In 1970, as a result of the Iraq army's military defeats against Kurdish rebellions across Kurdistan, the Ba'athist government was forced to make an agreement with the Kurdish National Liberation movement. The agreement was announced in March 1970, it recognised that the Kurdish people had some cultural and linguistic rights in the frame of local autonomy (Yildiz, 2004). Hence, the Kurdish press once more gained some freedom, since the agreement contained an article allowing the use of the Kurdish language. Many new newspapers and magazines were published, and a number of old newspapers, that had been closed earlier by the previous governments, were started again (Murad, 2011). Hassanpour (1996, p.54) describes the printing process in this period as follows:

During the 1970s, printing facilities, private and government-owned, were set up in Dhok, Suleymaniye, Erbil and Baghdad. The Kurdish academy, established in 1972 under an agreement between the government and the autonomists, had an output hitherto unseen in the world of Kurdish book publishing, and printed the works of individual authors at reduced prices. By the late 1970s, however, the academy and its printing activity were reduced to the minimum.

Furthermore, even the ministry of culture and information in Iraq issued Kurdish periodicals, in Baghdad and in Kurdish cities; but, the majority were cultural, literary or linguistic periodicals and even those that had political content, that was in parallel with the government's policy, were published (El-Bettî, 2011). To illustrate this further, the following items were issued by the Iraqi government during this time: *Hawkarî* newspaper (Cooperation) in 1970, *Roşnbîrî nwê* (New Culture) magazine (1973-1997), *Karwan* (Journey) magazine (1982-1991), *Êraq* (Iraq) newspaper (1977), *Korrî Zaniyarî Kurd* (Kurdish Academy) magazine (1973), *Pêşrrewî Zaniest* (Forefront of Science) magazine (1971), *Rengîn* (Colourful) magazine (1987-2003) and the *Aso* (Horizon) newspaper (1989-1990). In addition, several modern printing houses were established across the country which promoted the publishing of both Kurdish and Arabic press items (El-Bettî, 2011). More importantly, this temporary peaceful resolution provided an opportunity for the Kurds to establish many cultural, artistic and educational organisations, unions and associations that could function with their various activities in a relatively free manner (Murad, 2011). To illustrate, the *Korrî Zaniyarî Kurdî*

(Kurdish Academy) was established in 1972 – this academy played a significant role in the improvement of Kurdish printing conditions (Hassanpour, 1992, p.177).

This flourishing period for the Kurdish press did not last long and in August 1971 relations between Kurdish autonomists and the Baghdadi regime once again worsened and in March 1974 the clashes were renewed (BBC, 2011a; Remezan, 2008). The majority of newspapers and magazines that were published by the government remained in circulation until they collapsed with the Kurdish revolution in 1975. This occurred as a result of the Algeria agreement between the Iraqi and Iranian governments.¹⁰

Nevertheless, the period that followed the 1970 agreement, allowed appropriate grounds for the issuing of various periodicals and publications. Some of these periodicals continued until the relationship between the Kurds and Baghdad deteriorated again. The most prominent publications which were launched after the agreement of March 1970, included: *Korrî Zaniyarî Kurd* (Kurdish Academy), *Nûserî Nwê* (New Writer), *Roşnbîr* (Cultured), *Tîşkî Huner* (Arts Ray), *Zaniyarî* (Knowledge), *Çya* (Mountain), *Jîn* (Life), *Gzng* (Emergence) and *Berew Rûnakî* (Towards the Lights), to name a few (see Appendix 1 for further information).

Although the Kurdish political and cultural movements stumbled during this period, they did not end. Only three months after the announcement of the collapse of the revolution in 1975, a new Kurdish party, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) was founded under the leadership of Jalal Talabani.¹¹ Furthermore, a year later confrontations resumed once again between the Kurdish *Peshmerga*¹² fighters and the Iraqi army; hence, a new stage of the Kurdish underground press, which became known as the “mountain press” began. This press was a revolutionary press, edited and printed in the mountainous area of Iraqi Kurdistan, which was the stronghold of the Kurdish national party’s forces. Not only were the political organs of these parties

10 - On the side-line of the OPEC meeting held in Algeria, a peace agreement was signed between Iraq and Iran to end their conflicts. This allowed Iran to have sovereignty over some of the disputed channels in southern Iraq. As a result they ceased their support of Iraqi Kurdish rebellions (see: Sherzad, 1992; Yildiz, 2004; Tomas, 2007).

11 - Jalal Talabani was the president of Iraq from 2005-2014.

12 - The Kurdish warrior called Peshmerga, this is a Kurdish word meaning challenging the death.

issuing periodicals, but their civic and professional members, especially students, teachers and women organisations were also issuing periodicals. The main goal of these mountainous and revolutionary presses was to publish, clandestinely, in the cities and the villages as well. The ultimate aim was to keep people in touch with the Kurdish movement that was happening in the mountains by informing them of their policies and the latest news with regard to Kurdish fighting activities against the Iraqi army (Tenya, 2004). Soon after the foundation of the PUK, two periodicals were issued, one in Arabic entitled *Elşerare* (The Spark) and the other in Kurdish entitled *Rêbazî Nwê* (The New Approach), by the PUK in order to publish its policies and messages ('Umer, 2002; Bayz, 2001).

Furthermore, other new Kurdish parties were founded which contributed to the Kurdish political, armed and cultural struggles that opposed the Ba'athist regime, including the Kurdistan Socialist Movement (KSM) which issued many periodicals, for instance the *Surên* (A Mountain) and *Bzûtnewe* (Movement) magazines. The KDP also issued many periodicals, including the magazines of *Rizgarî*, *Metîn* (A Mountain) and *Ezmir* (A Mountain) (for further information, see Appendix 1).

2.6.5 The golden era (1991 onwards)

Some Kurdish intellectuals and media experts believe that the Kurdish media saw its golden era in the wake of the popular uprising of 1991, when hundreds of periodicals were published and television and radio stations were founded (Marf, 2010; Eyub, 2008; Hemesalîhî, 2008 , pp.171-172). As an example of this, Bayz who was a politician and journalist from the Kurdish mountainous press in the pre-1991 uprising, later in his book, titled *Rageyandinî şorrş û bzûtnewey şîrî Kurdî* (The Media of the Revolution and Kurdish Poet Movement), acknowledges that the popular uprising brought radical changes to the political, cultural and literary life in Kurdistan, despite the abolition of censorship (Bayz, 2001, p.74). The significant liberation of the Kurdish region, as a result of this uprising, cleared the way for the issuing of unlimited numbers of Kurdish periodicals and broadcasting stations (El-Bettî, 2011).

The Kurdish press from this period has been influenced by several characteristics. According to 'Elî (1998), Kurdish periodicals in general were improved in terms of editing, printing quality, design as well as in the publishing of subjects in various fields. Moreover, the most important tasks that were undertaken by the press at that time,

included the mobilising of people to support the achieving of goals for the uprising, this included: facing the Ba'athist party's regime, facing media and political campaigns against the Kurds; the coverage of activities of the political parties, government and parliament; whilst also leading the Kurdish culturally to generate improvements in the standard of Kurdish writings, language and literature. The political parties played a leading role in the evolution of the Kurdish press in this period. Two daily newspapers were issued the *Kurdistanî nwe* (New Kurdistan), which was launched on 12 January 1992 by the PUK, and the *Xebat* (Struggle), which was first published in September 1992 by the KDP. Many other periodicals were issued by other parties and civil society organisations. In addition, many Arabic publications were also issued by the Iraqi opposition parties, who had resorted to the Kurdistan region to escape from the Ba'athist regime, including the *El-Mutemer* (Congress) newspaper by the Iraqi National Congress (INC) on 14 May 1993 in Erbil city (El-Wasîti, 2012).

Moreover, several printing and publishing houses were founded and many of the Kurdish intellectuals contributed to the management and development of these publishing houses. Kurdish books and magazines were published in various fields, in addition to the issuing of various scientific, cultural and intellectual magazines. The most prominent publishing houses that are still publishing to-date include *Serdam* (The Era) founded in 1998, the *Jîn* foundation for reviving Kurdish culture in 2004, *Mukiryan* in 2000, *Aras* in 1998, and *Spîrêz* in 2002 (El-Bettî, 2011). These publishing houses have contributed significantly by enriching the Kurdish libraries with Kurdish books of different subjects. This literature has created many benefits to the new generations who have suffered as a result of not understanding foreign languages.

The foundation of the local Kurdish parliament, after the general election on 19 May 1992, accelerated this progress even further for the press. One of the most important steps taken by this parliament in its early stages was the issuance of the publications law, on 25 April 1993, to regulate journalistic work in the region. This law consists of 19 articles; importantly, article two confirms the freedom of the press and the free issuance of publications without censorship. Furthermore, the law in article 14 guarantees that the media can work freely as foreign reporters and as media teams in the Kurdistan region (El-Kurdî, 2010).

Nevertheless, in general and in the early period since the popular uprising of 1991, there was a lack of critical periodicals for many considerations. According to El-Kurdî

(2010), the Kurdish administrative experience was in its infancy at that time, and the journalists and writers were only just starting to take the new situations into account, as the vast majority of publications were partisan and were concerned with publishing the positive aspects of the local government, such as providing public services to the people despite the activities of the local government, parliament and the parties. Thus, it was rare to find real criticism for the leadership or administrative parties. However, when the independent newspapers appeared in the early 2000s, the Kurdish media developed and delivered a more advanced stance in terms of their style of work. The most prominent independent newspaper was *Hawllatî* (The Citizen) that was launched by *Renc* printing house on 5 November 2000 in Sulaymaniyah and it is still in publication today (Abdulrahman, 2007; Murad, 2011). *Hawllatî* is considered a successful and widespread newspaper of Iraqi Kurdistan, it tends to heavily criticise the regional government's defects and policies of the Kurdish ruling parties, whilst also revealing corruption (El-Bettî, 2011). Moreover, the *Awêne* newspaper is another Kurdish local independent newspaper that was founded more recently on 1 March 2006, in Sulaymaniyah city. According to Marf (2010), this newspaper not only criticises the Kurdish government and the ruling parties, but it also addresses many other local and regional subjects, such as Iraq's policy towards the Kurds, the USA's attitude towards Iraq and the Kurdistan region, whilst also identifying threats that may affect the Kurdistan region and its stability, to name just a few subjects.

2.7 Radio broadcasting

The emergence of Kurdish radio programmes and their development throughout the last century, besides the periodicals, played a considerable role in promoting Kurdish media and its language despite drawing Kurdish media features for the time being. The first appearance of the radio station occurred in the early 1920s in the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States of America; however, Kurdish radio broadcasting also had, to some extent, an early start. The beginnings of Kurdish radio broadcasting are linked to some programmes that were broadcast on some non-Kurdish radio stations. Nadirov 1992 (cited in Hassanpour, 1992, p.282) reported that for the first time Kurdish radio programmes were broadcast in the Kurdish self-ruling region which was founded in the former Soviet Union (USSR) between 1923 and

1929.¹³ For the Iraqi Kurds, this new media instrument came relatively late when compared to its use by the Kurds of the former Soviet Union. Furthermore, it was almost a decade later that, for the Soviet Kurds, Kurdish programmes were broadcast in Iraq. According to Mîhemed (2000) and Swarî (2009), for the first time Kurdish programmes were broadcast in Iraq on 19 November 1939 from the radio station in Baghdad, this was under the supervision of the government. In their beginnings, these Kurdish programmes contained mainly news, music and commentaries, whereas during the 1950s the programmes varied more and included religious education and stories (Hassanpour, 1996). The Kurdish division within Baghdad's radio station was expanded and the amount in which it broadcast information was increased, over time, by the government. This expansion was because of the Iraqi government's realization of the importance of intensifying its discourse toward the Kurdish people, despite meeting Kurdish intellectuals and the revolution's demands. Thus, in 1973, the Kurdish section broadcast for 15 hours every day (Elrrawî, 1991, p.85; Fatah and Durroei, 1998). Hassanpour (1992, p.283) identifies the development of Kurdish airing times at the *Baghdad* radio station, these are presented in Table 1, below.

Year	Total Daily Hours
1939	0:15
1945	1:00
1949	2:45
1951	3:00
1957 (November)	3:00
1960 (June)	4:00
1960 (November)	6:00
1974	8:55
1975	16:05
1976	16:27
1977	15: 25
1978	19:30
1979-84	16:25
1984	17:25

Table 1: Development of Kurdish airing time for the Baghdad radio station

13 - There is no accurate information about these Kurdish programmes, in terms of dates for when they began, how long they broadcasted for or any other aspects (see Hassanpour, 1992).

During the Second World War, the necessities of propaganda warfare fuelled the creation of many radio stations in the Middle East and Africa; programmes could then be broadcast in various languages, including Kurdish (Hassanpour, 1996). To illustrate, the British formed a Kurdish section at the *Haifa* radio station, which lasted from 1942 to 1944, this station was mainly used for propaganda purposes against Nazism (Emîn, 2002). During the French mandate over Lebanon and Syria, Kurdish programmes in the *Kirmanji* dialect were broadcast from radio *Levant* in Beirut, from 5 March 1941; furthermore, only two programmes were broadcast each week, each of which lasted for 30 minutes and was supervised by Kameran Bedirxan (Tejel, 2009, p.23). According to Hassanpour (1996) and Temo (2003), this radio station continued to broadcast Kurdish programmes until 1946 when, at this time, the radio station was given to the Lebanese government.

Meanwhile, the authorities of the former USSR formally allowed Kurdish broadcasting in the early 1940s; this led to another Kurdish section being founded at the Yerevan radio station in Armenia. This station was closed for a while, but on the 1 January 1955, it began re-broadcasting for initially only 15 minutes per week (Zagros, 2011; Kakeyî, 2002). Moreover, in 1957, during the deterioration of the relationship between Baghdad and Cairo, during Jamal Abdul Nassir's era, the Egyptian government as a part of its plan to face the Iraq and Baghdad pact,¹⁴ was allocated 45 minutes at *Radio Cairo*, which was a government station, to broadcast in Kurdish (Hassanpour, 1996). Many Kurdish nationalist songs were broadcast in the hope that they would influence the Kurds in Iraq and Iran. To illustrate, Hassanpour (1996, p.75) states:

The programme consisted of news exposing the Iraqi monarchy and the Baghdad pact, together with nationalist Kurdish poetry and music, including nationalist songs such as *Ey Reqîb* ("O Enemy") and *Ey Kurdine* ("O Kurds!"). Such things had not been heard on the air since the fall of the Kurdish republic in 1946, and they had a profound impact.

This Kurdish broadcasting period, which was influenced by the anti-Baghdad pact policy, was soon faced by another Kurdish broadcasting station in Kermanshah city in Iranian Kurdistan, this station was launched by the Tehran government (Kakeyî, 2002).

14 - The main goal of the Baghdad pact, which was created by Britain, Iraq, Turkey, Iran and Pakistan in 1955, was to stand against the influences of the former Soviet Union in order to prevent interference by reinforcing regional protection (see Butt, 2003).

Nevertheless, Kurdish broadcasting only lasted for short periods as they only formed departments or sections within the existing radio stations of other nations and they were often run by non-Kurdish bodies; therefore, it can be said that they were serving specific policies and political agendas for the governmental bodies of the time. For example, the Kurdish section of the Egyptian radio criticised the Baghdad pact, whilst the Kurdish programmes in the *Iranian* radio station in Kermanshah were defending the pact by criticising the Egyptians, and so on. Only with the emergence of the Kurdish political armed movements and parties did the pure Kurdish radio stations develop which truly served Kurdish policies and the Kurdish people (Salîh, 2003). For instance, in 1946 when the Republic of Kurdistan was established in Sabilax city, by Qazi Muhammad and his partisans, a Kurdish radio station was founded which was based on pure Kurdish policy; however, it soon closed after less than 11 months because of the collapse of the republic by the Iranian army (Emîn, 2002). This radio station, which had been a gift from the former Soviet Union to the new Kurdish government, later became the government's official channel for broadcasting in Kurdish. It broadcast for six hours each day by covering the news and activities of the republic's administration departments; in addition, it worked to present the government's views on the different events that were occurring in the region and across the world (Ehmed, 2011).

The revolution of September 1961 also played a significant role in paving the way for the emergence of Kurdish radio stations and their development in Iraqi Kurdistan. Hassanpour (1996) agrees that one of the main results of the war by the Kurdish movement was in it gaining its own radio station, which was independent from the influence of the Iraqi government and its policies towards the Kurds. The revolution fuelled the central government's pledge to improve the Kurdish section at *Baghdad's* radio station, in terms of increasing the broadcasting periods and the quality of the programmes. Thus, in the late 1960s, the Kurdish programmes had increased to include subjects that focused on Kurdish history and linguistics as well as small bulletins covering the needs of women, children and farmers. Furthermore, prior to the breakdown of the Kurdish military movement, the Iraqi government established a Kurdish radio station in Kirkuk city on 18 July 1971, to cover the Kurdish provinces, despite some parts of the Kurdish territories being in Iran and Turkey (El-Rrawî, 1991; El-Dawdî, 2004).

More importantly, two years after the eruption of the Kurdish revolution, and in the midst of the confrontations with the Iraqi army, on 28 September 1963, a Kurdish radio station *Radiyoyi Dengê Kurdistan* (Radio Voice of Kurdistan, later became Radio Voice of Iraqi Kurdistan) was set up by the KDP in the liberated areas that were controlled by the Kurdish forces (Salîh, 2003; El-Caf, 2011). According to Jalal (2007) and Bayz (2001, p.144) this station, which was the first radio station of the Iraqi Kurdish revolution, broadcast the military activities of *Peshmerga*, which included awareness speeches and educational articles. Hassanpour (1992) points out that this radio station continued to work spasmodically due to the unstable situations (ranging from battle to sometimes peaceful negotiations) with the Baghdadi government; however, with the defeat of the Kurdish revolution in March 1975, this radio station was permanently closed.

The silence of Kurdish nationalism, on the airwaves, lasted for around four years. This silence had a negative effect on the general morale amongst the Kurds; however, the PUK ended this Kurdish silence on 20 March 1979 when they established the radio station *Dengê Yekêtî Nîşitmanî Kurdistan* (the Voice of the PUK) – this later became *Dengi Geli Kurdistan* (the Voice of the Kurdistan People) ('Umer, 2002). The main goals of this radio station were to firstly, reveal the crimes that were conducted by Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist party against the Kurds; secondly, broadcast the news of the armed activities of the *Peshmerga*; and, thirdly, introduce the Kurdish people to the martyrs who had sacrificed their lives for Kurdish issues and purposes (Xaneqînî, 2000). This created proper grounds for other Kurdish parties to develop stations; for example, the KSM established the radio station *Dengê şorrşî kurdistanî îraq* (the Voice of the Iraqi Kurdistan Revolution) on 15 September 1983, with very similar goals (Bayz, 2001, p.151). From this period, several clandestine Kurdish radio stations were established by the Kurdish parties in areas that were liberated and controlled by the *Peshmerga*. It is worth noting that the two major radio stations of the Kurdish revolution of this period and until the popular uprising of March 1991, were the *Voice of the Kurdistan People*, which was run by the PUK and the *Voice of Iraqi Kurdistan* which belonged to the KDP and was re-broadcast in the 1980s (Mawlood, 2011; Eħmed, 2011; Bayz, 2001, p.145).

The popular uprising of Iraqi Kurdistan in 1991, and the withdrawal of the government administrative institutions by the Ba'athist regime in same year, led to the

liberation of parts of the Kurdish territories. This acted as a starting point for the founding of many public Kurdish radio stations. Hence, the Kurdish media in general sought to evolve in many aspects as many commercial, artistic and independent stations were founded; however, the majority of the radio stations were run by the political parties, particularly by the PUK and the KDP (Abdulrahman, 2007). Hassanpour (1996) argues that the founding of the Kurdish government in the liberated area of Iraqi Kurdistan, after the Gulf War in 1991, led to the broadcasting of services that were operated by the local government and political parties, especially by the main parties of the PUK and the KDP. During this time, other minor parties also had their own radio stations.

Furthermore, Hassanpour (1996) notes that one of the most prominent Kurdish broadcasters was the Kurdish section of *The Voice of America* (VOA) which began airing Kurdish programmes on 25 April 1992. This Kurdish section in the VOA was founded as a result of the new situation in the Middle East, which was created after the Gulf War and the military defeat in Iraq. In the aftermath of the collapse of the Ba'athist regime in April 2003, many other stations were founded in the three provinces of the region (displayed in Figure 7). By Feb. 2015, there were 127 Kurdish radio stations that broadcast in the Kurdistan region, as well as several other stations that broadcast in Arabic, English, Assyrian and Turcoman. The broadcast of a number of these radio stations covered the entire Kurdish region of Iraq such as *Dengî Kurdistan* (the voice of Kurdistan), *Dengî Kurdsat* (the voice of Kurdsat), *Dengî Gelî Kurdistan* (the voice of Kurdistan people) and others. While many other radio stations use narrowcast transmission to cover specific cities or towns in the region. Moreover, there are several Kurdish radio stations in Kirkuk city which is outside of the KRG administration such as *Kirkuk FM*, *Radio Baba gurr gurr*, *Ashti* (peace), *Shafeq* (nightfall) and others (see Appendix 2).

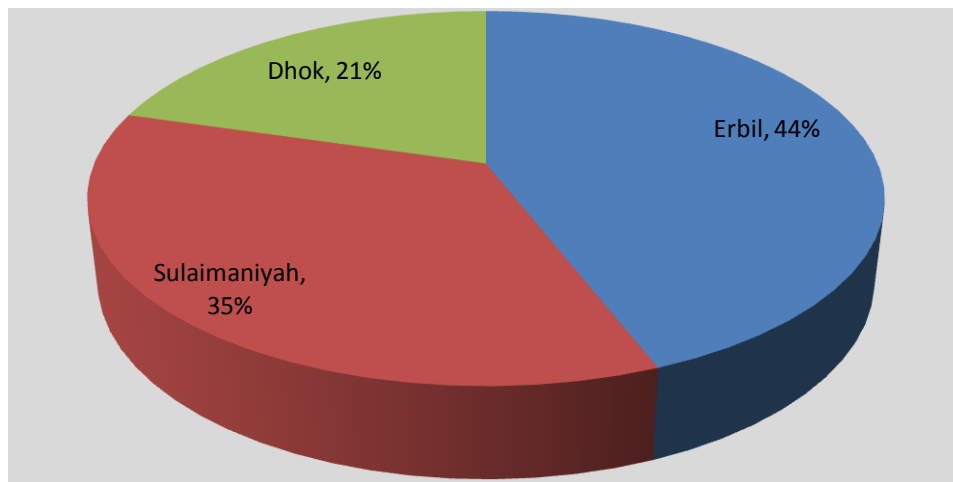


Figure 7: The proportion of the distribution of Kurdish radio stations in the Kurdistan Region, according to the provinces (2015)

2.8 Television broadcasting

The Kurdish people in Iraq could not make use of the benefits of television (TV) broadcasts since the Iraqi government practised strict policies against Kurdish television broadcasts (Fatah and Durroei, 1998). It was not until the late 20th century that the Kurds had their own TV channels. The Kurds had a few programmes which were aired on the central government television channels in Iraq and Iran; they were operated under strict government policies, but these programmes had, to some extent, a relatively positive role in promoting Kurdish cultural aspects. Nonetheless, it is claimed that the first television programmes that were actually aired in the Kurdish language were not aired until the 1960s. According to Fethwallh (2007), for the first time Kurdish television programmes were broadcast from an Iranian TV station in 1960, from Tehran. These programmes were also broadcast in Persian and Azeri.

In Iraq, the first Arab TV station was founded in Baghdad, it began broadcasting formally on 2 May 1956 in Arabic; at this time, the government did not permit the Kurds to have their own TV channel or to air programmes in the Kurdish language. After approximately 11 years, the Iraqi government established two regional television stations in the north of the country, one in Kirkuk city in 1967, and the other in Mosul city in 1968, for the airing of only Arabic programmes (Hassanpour, 1996). Months later, in early 1968, the government founded a Kurdish section in the form of a Kirkuk TV station – this allowed for Kurdish programmes and news to be broadcast beside the Arabic, Turcoman and Assyrian programmes. Later, from March 1969, the amount of Kurdish programmes being aired gradually increased by many hours per day

(Hassanpour 1996; Elrrawî, 1991). The *Kirkuk TV* station operated under severe control from the Iraqi Ba'athist regime; however, it played an effective role in improving the Kurdish culture and served the arts (Al-Ittihad, 2007). At the same time, the autonomy agreement between the Kurds and the Iraqi government in 1970 was established; this gave the Kurdish media better opportunities. A good example of this is that the Kurdish section of the *Kirkuk TV* station was actually separated as a distinct channel that only broadcast in Kurdish. In 1980, once again, this Kurdish channel returned as a part of the *Kirkuk* channel station, which was shared with other languages by broadcasting its programmes on the same channel. This TV channel continued to operate in this way until 1998, when it was permanently closed by the Iraqi government.

Irrespective of the difficulties facing the Kurdish TV broadcasting process, the popular uprising in March 1991 cleared the way for the founding of many Kurdish television outlets. The political parties, who had the financial capabilities, had the leading role in establishing these outlets. These television stations were terrestrial, in Kurdish and they were operated by the local Kurdish media experts. Most of the programmes were in the form of entertainment, which was aired in the evening/night (Abdulrahman, 2007). The first TV station was launched on 11 September 1991 by the PUK in Sulaymaniyah city; this was followed by two further outlets in 1992 in Erbil city which were run by the KRG and the KDP. Additional stations were founded by other Kurdish political parties in the period which followed (Fethwallh, 2007; Hassanpour, 1996). Hassanpour (1996) further argues that, in the beginning, these local television stations were broadcasting programmes and footage, which focused mainly on the Ba'athist party's brutal campaigns that were conducted against the Kurds. This was to remind the people of the brutal actions of that regime, in order to document these actions and motivate the Kurds against the Ba'athist regime. This policy and style of work are still obvious in many Kurdish satellites and traditional media outlets, besides online mainstream sites in the Kurdistan region where they concentrate on issues similar to that, were broadcast by the early terrestrial TV stations in the region. On various occasions these channels, especially those belonging to the ruling parties, broadcast programmes commemorating and honouring the tragedies of the Kurds, showing the threats facing the Kurds, glorification of the gains and advantages of different Kurdish revolutions and liberation movements, extolling the virtues of those

who sacrificed their lives for the Kurdish question and many others. Therefore, it can be said that Kurdish contemporary journalism is closely linked to Kurdish journalism in the last century, which was mostly a revolutionary press (Hemesalî, 2008, p. 173). These local channels were dependent on satellite channels for the recording of programmes and news in the different fields by covering political, economic, social and entertainment aspects – in order to cover their needs and broadcast them to the local audiences. By Feb. 2015, there was 82 Kurdish terrestrial television stations that air their programmes in the region (see Appendix 3), the majority of these terrestrial televisions are located in Erbil city as illustrated in Figure 8, below. In addition, in Kirkuk province, which is officially outside of the KRG administration, there are also several Kurdish terrestrial TV channels. For example, *Baba Gurr Gurr* (name of an oil field), is affiliated to the KDP, *Yekgirtû* (united) affiliated to the KIU, *Komellî îslamî* (Islamic group) affiliated to the KIG, *Azadî* (freedom) by the KCP and Kirkuk Sport by the PUK (Kirkuk Now, 2012).

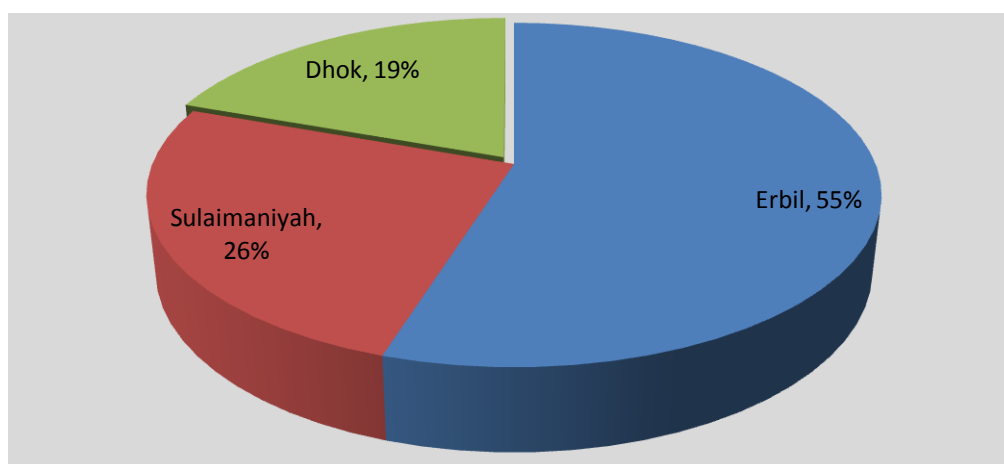


Figure 8: Distribution of the terrestrial television stations, according to the Kurdistan Region's provinces (2015)

Kurdish satellite broadcasting was not really any better than its terrestrial broadcasting and it was only when *Med TV* started transmissions in Europe on 30 March 1995 that the Kurdish people were really able to broadcast independently through the space (Hassanpour, 1998, p. 55). According to Fatah and Durroei (1998), this TV channel operated in a manner which renovated and promoted the Kurdish culture, identity and language, whilst also reporting on local and international events, via Kurdish people throughout the world. The Kurdish Foundation Trust was the financier of *MED-TV*, they identified the following goals for their station (Merrifield, 2005):

To assist in the development of the cultural identity of the Kurdish people and the Kurdish language throughout the world; to establish, promote and maintain media facilities and resources to educate and inform Kurdish people; and to work for the relief of poverty and suffering amongst the Kurdish people.

Merrifield (2005) illustrates the importance of the first Kurdish satellite channel by stating that despite the fact that the Kurds could not gain their rights and autonomy even after decades of fighting against Ankara, Baghdad, Tehran and Damascus, the founding of *Med-TV* had at least meant that they had achieved sovereignty in the sky.

Within the Iraqi Kurdish region, the first Kurdish satellite station was *Kurdistan TV*, which was established by the KDP in Erbil and began broadcasting in January 1999. After a short period, in January 2000, *Kurdsat*, another Kurdish satellite channel, was founded by the PUK in Sulaymaniyah city. By February 2015, there were 26 Iraqi Kurdish satellite stations listed as broadcasting from the Kurdish region (see Appendix 4). The vast majority of these were explicitly financed by the political parties such as the Kurdsat, Kurdistan TV, *KNN* (Kurdish News Network), *Spêde* (Morning) or *Peyam* (Message). The Kurdistan regional government (KRG), also established and financed a satellite TV (*Newroz TV*) in 2007, but it was closed in 2010. A number of channels were deemed to be operated by the private sector, for example the *NRT* (Nalia Radio and Television) belonged to a private company, the *Nalia* Company for investments, see Figure 9, below for more illustration.

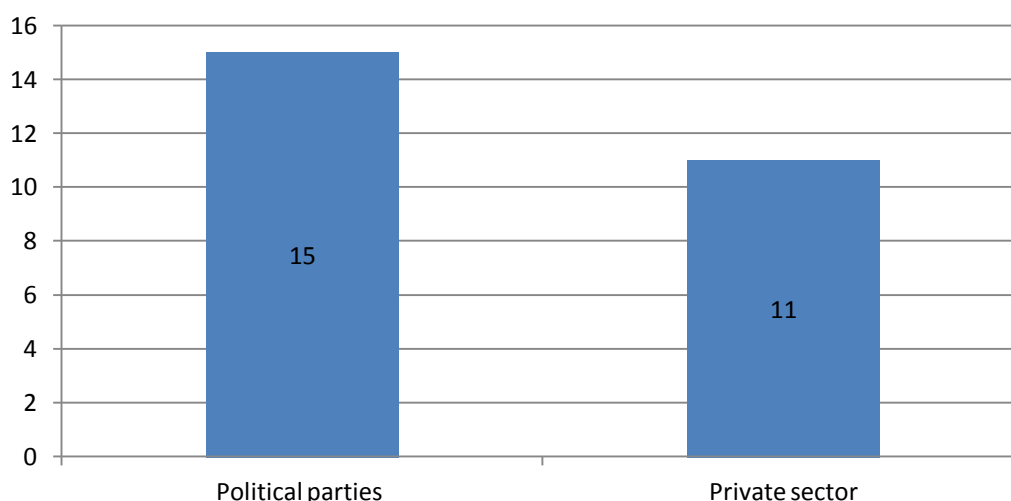


Figure 9: The distribution of Iraqi Kurdish satellite channels according to the financiers (2015)

In addition to these Iraqi Kurdish satellites, other Kurdish and Arabic channels were broadcast from the Kurdistan region, due to it offering more stability and security. For example, many Iranian Kurdish political parties, who settled in the region by

requesting sanctuary, founded their own satellite channels and now broadcast from the region. A good example of this is *Rojhelat* (East) and *Kurd TV*, both of which broadcast from the Kurdistan region; the first one in Sulaymaniyah, is financed by the Kurdistan Revolutionaries and Toilers Junta, whereas the second broadcasts from Erbil and is funded by the Iranian Kurdistan Democratic Party (Ehmed, 2011). Some Arabic satellite channels have also preferred to broadcast from the secure and stable Kurdish region; for example, El-Feyha is an Arabic channel which broadcasts from Sulaymaniyah city. Figure 10, below, shows the geographical distribution of the various Iraqi Kurdish satellite channels from Iraq by Feb. 2015.

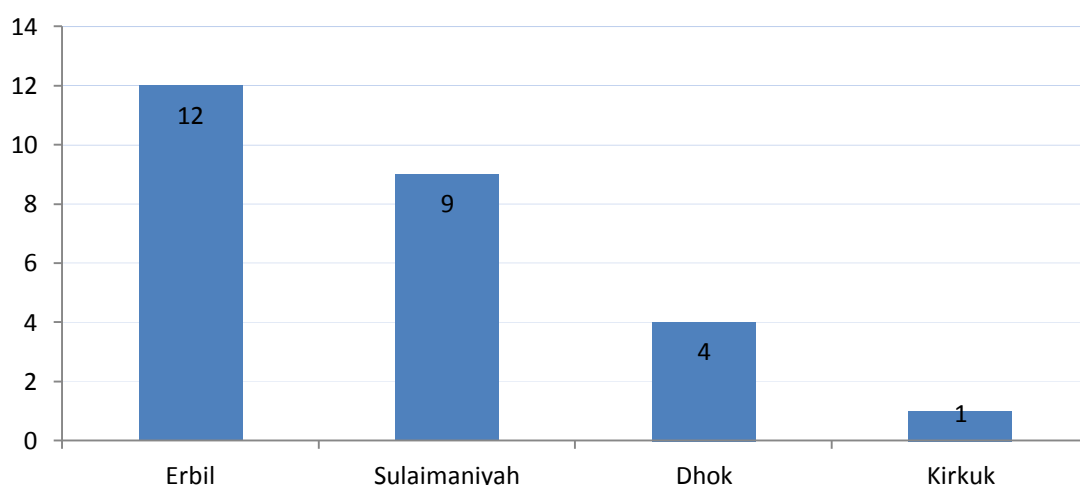


Figure 10: The geographical distribution of Iraqi Kurdish satellite channels in Iraq (2015)

2.9 Kurdish media in the diaspora

It is widely believed that the emergence and the development of the Kurdish media in the diaspora, especially in western countries, is as a result of the existence of considerable numbers of Kurdish immigrants in these areas. Merrifield (2005) believes that the Kurdish migration to European countries created a national awareness amongst these people, which has led to an improvement in their cultural situation. To illustrate, many activities have been conducted in an attempt to specifically promote the Kurdish language and the establishment of institutions, including the founding of media channels which further supports this notion. Furthermore, Hassanpour (1996, p.71) considers the steep increase in the number of Kurdish immigrants to western countries as the main reason behind the growth in Kurdish publications, as such:

The sharp increase in the number of Kurdish refugees in western countries (about half a million by the mid-1990s) has expanded the market for Kurdish publications. Before 1975, limited publishing was

conducted, sporadically, by student organisations, individuals and supporters of Kurdish political parties. Since the 1980s, several publishing groups have emerged in European countries, especially in Sweden and Germany.

Consequently, the Kurdish media from the diaspora has played a significant role in enhancing Kurdish nationalism movements. According to Van Bruinessen (2000), since the Kurdish media appeared from the diaspora as a result of the state's censorship, their nationalism movements have gained importance as a tool for nation building. Van Bruinessen (2000) highlights the essential roles of the Kurdish in the diaspora, as follows:

The communications revolution and the emergence of an organised Kurdish diaspora have changed the nature of the Kurdish question. It is no longer a conflict that only involves the Kurds themselves and the states of the region but it has imposed itself on the political agendas of European countries and the USA as well.

The Kurds in exile have not only played a substantial role in promoting their language and other cultural aspects, but they have also provided significant assistance to their people that remain in parts of Kurdistan, for humanitarian purposes as well as by supporting the continuous armed struggle there (Van Bruinessen, 2000).

Furthermore, because of the prohibition of the use of the Kurdish language for publications in parts of Kurdistan, particularly in Turkey, Syria and Iran, many Kurdish political parties, civic organisations and individuals have resorted to the diaspora for support against the political constraints by helping them to produce publications. The presence of modern printing, in spite of the new broadcasting technologies, has also been of help in supporting the provision of a proper ground for minority publications. However, as Hassanpour (1996) states, the financial difficulties for the immigrants, still pose a serious problem that is impeding the development of the Kurdish media in the diaspora. Additionally, the weak distribution of the publications is another problem affecting the Kurdish press. The dispersion of the Kurds, in the diaspora, has created further difficulties especially for the publication distribution companies that are not prepared to provide non-profitable distribution projects to the relatively small number of Kurds in each of the different countries.

Nonetheless, in the past few decades, a number of Kurdish satellite television and radio broadcasting stations have been founded by the diaspora; it is believed that they have been sponsored by some of the Kurdish political parties. To illustrate further, the

Kurdish satellites broadcasting in the diaspora, include: *Roj TV* (Sun – this was suspended in January 2012) was broadcast from Denmark; *Tîşk* (Ray) from France; *Komala* (Association) and *Newroz* (Kurdish First Day of the Kurdis Year) from Sweden; *Stêrk* (Star); and, *MMC* (Mesopotamia Music Channel) from Europe (Ehmed, 2011). All of these Kurdish satellite stations are broadcast from the diaspora and irrespective of whether they were founded by the Iraqi Kurdish parties or by the Kurds from other parts of Kurdistan, they cover Greater Kurdistan and deal with various news and event related items that cause concern or interest to the Kurdish everywhere. Figure 11, below, displays the logos of some Kurdish satellite TV stations in the diaspora.



Figure 11: Logos of some Kurdish satellite TV stations in the diaspora

In terms of radio broadcasting in the diaspora, the Kurdish immigrants have also established many stations, as they require much lower financial help compared to the satellite stations. In many European countries, such as: Germany, Sweden, France, Denmark and Belgium, in addition to the USA and Australia, Kurdish radio stations have been founded by Kurds from all parts of Kurdistan, to broadcast to and for the Kurds. Good examples of this include *Awat* (Hope), *Serdam* (Era), *Aştî* (Peace), *Aware* (Refugee) and *Dengî Gel* (the Voice of the People), in Sweden. Other Kurdish stations are present as Kurdish departments of some national radio stations in France as well as the *Voice of Media* in Belgium, as well as many others in the other countries (Ehmed, 2011).

In the same way, the Kurds from Iraqi Kurdistan, alongside their clandestine and public publications in their homeland, launched a considerable number of publications in the diaspora. Many Kurdish intellectuals, students, Kurdish party representatives

and their civic organisations have launched publications in Europe and other western capitals and major cities, particularly in Britain, Sweden, the United States of America, Germany, Belgium, France and elsewhere in Europe. In the UK as an example, many Kurdish periodicals have been published, including: *El-Sefîr El-Kurdistanî* (Kurdistan Ambassador) in 1981 in Arabic, *The Voice of Kurdistan* in 1981 in English, *Hellwêst* in 1984 in Kurdish, *Dengî xwêndkar u lawan* (the Voice of Students and Youths) in 1985 in Kurdish, *Peyv* (talk) in 1986 in Kurdish, *Mellbend* (Centre) in 1978 in Kurdish, as well as many other publications. Figure 12, below, displays the front pages of some Kurdish publications in the UK.



Figure 12: The front covers of Kurdish periodicals issued in the UK

According to El-Bettî (2011), the majority of these Kurdish publications are characterised by serious issues and diversity, and the manner in which they publish the news and views that reflects Kurdish ambitions and goals; importantly, they are also issued in several languages. Moreover, they are of a high quality in terms of their printing and paper usage, since they have been printed in developed countries.

2.10 Kurdish media: In the wake of the downfall of Saddam Hussein's regime (2003)

Major developments for the media in Iraq occurred in the aftermath of the fall of the Ba'athist regime in April 2003, as a result of conflict from the western allied forces. The historical events which followed, in Iraq, led to the cancellation of all restrictions and

institutions affecting the media in Iraq, especially in terms of the Ministry of Media. Furthermore, the international economic embargo, which was imposed over Iraq from 1990, as a result of its occupation of Kuwait, was finally lifted. Hence, the Iraqi markets were opened and fundamental advanced instruments and technologies were imported for the operating of satellite television and radio stations as well as print mediums. As such, modern printing presses, broadcasting sets and other necessities were imported into the Kurdistan region. As a consequence, a rapid increase in media activities occurred; many daily and weekly newspapers and magazines appeared, many radio and television stations were established and foreign media channel reporters and representatives were allowed to enter into Iraq, which became a hot international spot for events (To be discussed in more detail in chapter 4). Hlidkova argues that the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime brought a significant prosperity to the Iraqi media:

In the aftermath of the 2003 invasion, Iraq underwent a media boom. Hundreds of new publications, television and radio stations sprang up across the country, and Iraqis gained access to satellite dishes and the Internet (Hlidkova, 2011).

Meanwhile various editorial trends and media policies for the publication and broadcasting channels emerged (El-Salhi 2009) (this will be discussed further in chapter 4). More importantly, many Internet companies such as Al-Madar, Earth Link, Rawafid Dijla, Al-Salami, Zain, HalaSat and Al-Zil established or flowed into Iraq, which resulted in an evolution in the media field (Ikhnews, 2011). It should be noted that prior to 2003, all television and radio stations, as well as the periodicals produced, belonged to the Ba'athist regime. In terms of the Internet, the situation was even worse. As the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (2006) reported, Internet services in Iraq were restricted and only one government Internet company existed, called *Uruklink* (Iraq State Company for Internet Services), to provide a service to some ministries and some public Internet cafes. All of which were subject to censorship by the government and Internet use was prohibited in private homes. Nonetheless, the new situation allowed for the introduction of overt political activities and the emergence of many new political parties, which helped to also create a better atmosphere for the political parties, to contribute to, as the media situation significantly evolved in Iraq.

For the Kurds, who had enjoyed freedom since 1991 in the Kurdistan region, the situation was different, to some extent, when compared to the other parts of Iraq; in

particular, for some areas the Kurds already had media diversity. This new era for the Kurdish media was characterised by the emergence of new media trends. On the one hand, the independent media flourished and many new independent outlets appeared, such as the *Awêne* newspaper and *livîn* and so on. However, on the other hand, when the opposition parties became active in the Kurdistan region, they launched their own media channels, which included *KNN TV*, *Peyam TV*, the *Rojname* newspaper, *Dengê Gorran Radio*, and many others. One of the most prominent policies of these channels of the time was that they criticised the local government and the ruling parties for their defects whilst also un-veiling corruption.

More importantly, the internet became an essential tool for the media especially for non-partisan organizations and activists. As Sheyholislami states:

Although the major Kurdish political organizations have a strong presence on the Internet, the vast majority of websites belong to smaller Kurdish organizations (i.e. those that do not own satellite television channels or other major media outlets), different groups of individuals and Kurdish intelligentsia (e.g. women activists, human rights groups) and ordinary individuals (Sheyholislami, 2010, p. 301).

With the global evolution of communication technology, the Kurdish press interacted with it and was influenced by the information evolution, which was brought mainly by the internet. This led to the emergence of a new Kurdish form of journalism where numerous online websites were founded, some of them were online versions of the newspapers and others were online news sites, and this online journalism became an important form of media in the region. This online journalism, which exceeded many restrictions and censorship that existed in the printed press and is still present in the partisan press, is believed to have had significant impact on freedom of speech and media work (this will be discussed in detail in chapter 8). Overall, following the fall of the Ba'athist regime, the media situation was improved in the Kurdistan region; however, concerns of freedom of expression and access to information for journalists were still deemed to be a major problem impeding media developments in the autonomous region. More importantly, journalists faced the fear of being insulted or detained by the security forces, as Hlidkova (2011, p1) states:

Increasingly, journalists and media advocates find themselves threatened, arrested and physically assaulted by security forces linked to government institutions and political parties.

Several assassination cases against journalists have occurred since 2007. For example, in July 2008, gunmen in Kirkuk city assassinated Soran Mame Heme, a 23 year-old journalist from independent *Lvîn* magazine, after he had published many reports unveiling corruption and criticising local authorities of the city (HRW, 2011; UNPO, 2008b). Two years later, in an indistinct condition, the Kurdish freelance journalist Serdest Osman, also 23 years of age, was kidnapped in front of the college where he was studying and was later found dead (Mawlood, 2011). It is believed that his assassination was in response to articles that he had written which criticised Kurdish authority; however, the formal investigations conducted by the government denied this allegation. Furthermore, there have been several attempts to silence publications and to stop journalists through detaining and threatening them. According to the Human Rights Watch report (HRW, 2011), in many cities in the region, journalists are regularly detained or insulted physically by the government or the ruling parties' private forces (this notion will be discussed in more detail in chapter 5).

This situation, despite the development and expansion of the media in the Kurdistan region, has made the regulation of this field necessary. Thus, in 2007 attempts were made to draft a special law for the press of the region. Media organisations, independent outlets, journalists and specialists all actively contributed to the drafting of a law that would guide appropriate standards for the freedom of the media freedom in order to guarantee the rights of the journalists. As a result, and after months of debates and controversies, in September 2008, the Kurdish parliament approved the law, which took effect once a presidential decree was issued (KRP, 2013) (again, this will be discussed in more detail in chapter 5).

2.11 Summary and Conclusion

The Kurdish press in Iraq has faced difficult conditions from its emergence until the popular uprising of March 1991. In order to continue, the Kurds attempted to overcome the obstacles they faced by resorting to issuing their publications clandestinely, in the diaspora or in the liberated mountainous area in Kurdistan. Therefore, as is obvious from the evidence presented in this chapter, numerous Kurdish publications issued between 1910 and March 1991 were either clandestinely issued or issued in the diaspora, out of sight and reach of the Iraqi authorities who were imposing many restrictions on the Kurdish press. Most importantly, the first

Kurdish periodical, TV programme and satellite station were all started in the diaspora, since they were away from the heavy censorship of the Kurdish language and cultural movements of the governments that occupied Kurdistan. Furthermore, the Kurdish periodicals from this period were generally characterised by being of poor quality and issued irregularly. In addition, they often resorted to the use of other languages, beside Kurdish, and they concentrated on nationalist subjects by showing the sufferings of the Kurdish people. This reality of the Kurdish press in the last century has had an impact on the Kurdish media overall for the time being. The speech and style of work in the clandestine press to some extent can still be seen, especially in many partisan media outlets. Moreover, the newspapers that were issued by the British in 1918 and 1920 in Baghdad and Sulaymaniyah, in addition to several periodicals issued later by several Kurdish linguistic, political or cultural bodies or individuals, especially *Jiyanewe*, *Jiyan*, *Gelawêj*, *Korrî Zanyarîy Kurdî* and others had a significant role in improving the Kurdish writing system for press and its development in the Kurdish territory in Iraq.

The Kurdish nationalism movements of these different periods used the press as an effective weapon against the different regimes that ruled in Baghdad, and as an important tool for building the Kurdish nation. Thus, the Kurdish political parties always sought to gain printing presses and other necessities of the press in an attempt to develop the Kurdish press further.

Nonetheless, the uprising of March 1991 acted as a turning point for the Kurdish media. The Kurds in Iraq could now publicly issue publications as well as publically admit to the founding of many radio, and terrestrial and satellite TV stations. The press in Iraqi Kurdistan improved gradually, and by early 1999 they were able to broadcast more freely; however, Kurdish media status was improved further when the independent press emerged in late 2000. Besides, since 1999 with the emergence of internet cafés in the Kurdistan region and its expansion in the years that followed, the newspapers and other traditional media outlets resorted to create their own websites on the internet to keep up with the new era of journalism. Further efforts have been made to enhance and promote the media situations in the region, through the creation of independent periodicals and the issuing of special laws; however, journalists still remain liable to physical threats, to some extent, and they are still banned from accessing certain information. The media situation in this developing

region still needs further effort in order for it to truly provide freedom of speech and for the journalists to feel safe by having rights to access information in order for the media to actually reach an acceptable degree of freedom universally. This chapter developed an understanding of the historical and present situation for the Kurdish media, which determined the historical development of Kurdish online journalism. It also provided knowledge of the Kurdish media features and its general trends and relations with the socio-political situation.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to address the research methods adopted by the researcher in this doctoral research project. It will identify and justify the strategy, the methods and sampling strategy used to: explore the role of online news sites in underpinning freedom of speech, with particular reference to the extension of the presidential term in 2013 in the Kurdistan region; to compare the Kurdish situation to that in other emerging democracies in order to identify common features and differences; to explore the relationship between online journalism and the public sphere; and to achieve the other aims and objectives of this research in general. This chapter also outlines some main differences between qualitative and quantitative research approaches.

3.2 Research paradigms

Conducting research about media and mass communication is an attempt to understand how different types of media really work, what affects they have and what affects them. For this purpose, researchers also tend to acknowledge the value of interpretive methods of research that are, in general, qualitative approaches where the outcomes are expressed in language rather than in numbers (Priest, 1996). In the case of this research project, the working assumption is that the development and emergence of online mainstream news sites in the Kurdistan region, despite having many constraints and barriers, has had an effect in creating new opportunities for people to express their opinions and attitudes freely.

This thesis examines online journalism in the Kurdistan region of Iraq and its role in political debate in this emerging democracy. It also focuses on the role of the Internet in the public sphere, explores the historical context in which Kurdish online journalism has developed and compares mass media in the Kurdistan region to that in other newly democratic countries. In addition to the mass media landscape, human rights conditions and the political system in the Kurdistan region and Iraq overall are explored. It explores the role of a mainstream news site in the Kurdistan region on freedom of speech as a case study. It tries to mainly answer questions of 'what' and 'how', as mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, through interpreting viewpoints and thoughts of the participants, media messages and secondary evidence; these

employ the use of qualitative methods in order to be answered (Swanborn, 2010; Priest, 1996).

Overall, there are two main research approaches, qualitative and quantitative. A quantitative approach deals with statistical analysis and, as Maykut and Morehouse (1994, p. 2) state, “is based on observations that are converted to discrete units that can be compared to other units by using statistical analysis”. While on the other hand, qualitative research aims to explore and evaluate things that cannot simply be presented in numbers (Priest, 1996, p. 5). It also can be described as an approach that enables researchers to examine people’s various experiences and attitudes closely in narrative or descriptive ways in detail by depending on the participants’ own accounts of situations, by using particular methods such as in-depth interviews, content analysis, participant observation or focus group discussion. Furthermore, this approach is associated with the subjective evaluation of habits, attitudes and points of view (Kothari, 2004, p. 5). Additionally, Maykut and Morehouse (1994, p.46) believe that qualitative studies mostly rely on individual arguments and activities; as such, they also identified four methods for the collection of data in such studies:

The data of qualitative inquiry is most often people’s words and actions, and thus requires methods that allow the researcher to capture language and behaviour. The most useful ways of gathering these forms of data are participant observation, in-depth interviewing, group interviews, and the collection of the relevant documents.

Qualitative approaches allow researchers to discover and recognise problems by relying on the viewpoints of the study’s participants and knowing the senses and explanations that they give to behaviour, activities or topics (Hennink, et. al, 2005, P. 9; Gerson and Horowitz, 2002, p. 199; Maykut and Morehouse, 1994, p. 2; Hakim, 1989, p, 8). Hennink, et al. (2011, P. 9) further state:

Qualitative researchers also study people in their natural settings, to identify how their experiences and behaviour are shaped by the context in which they live. Therefore, qualitative research also seeks to embrace and understand the contextual influences on the research issues.

The significance of the qualitative approach lies on several aspects. Hakim (1989, p. 27-28) states that there are two great strengths of qualitative research. First is the credibility and power of the information gained where specific people are interviewed in adequate detail “for the results to be taken as true, correct, complete, and believable reports of their views and experiences”. Second, a great strength of this

approach is in the study of motivation and other links between elements since “the question ‘why’ often cannot be asked, or answered, directly and may involve a variety of circumstantial and contextual factors creating links between, or choices between, apparently unrelated matters”. Besides, Gillham (2000, p.11) clarifies that qualitative methods allow researchers to do the following tasks:

- 1- To carry out an investigation where other methods – such as experiments – are either not practicable or not ethically justifiable.
- 2- To investigate situations where little is known about what is there or what is going on. More formal research may come later.
- 3- To explore complexities which are beyond the scope of more “controlled” approaches.
- 4- To “get under the skin” of a group or organisation to find out what really happens – the informal reality which can only be perceived from the inside.
- 5- To view the case from the inside out: to see it from the perspective of those involved.
- 6- To carry out research into the processes leading to results (for example, how reading standards were improved in a school) rather than into the “significance” of the results themselves.

Therefore, qualitative researchers normally not only deal with facts and events, but they also deal with the ways that people build, explain and give sense to these facts and events through their own situations (Gerson and Horowitz, 2002, p. 199).

Qualitative studies also deal with conditions, which are made by humans:

The qualitative researchers look to understand a situation as it is constructed by the participants. The qualitative researchers attempt to capture what people say and do, that is, the products of how people interpret the world. The task for the qualitative researcher is to capture this process of interpretation (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994, p.18).

This research examines the role that independent mainstream news sites of the Kurdistan region play on freedom of speech through analysing contents of opinion articles on *Awêne* online news site (the case of the extension of the presidential term in 2013). It explores the most common barriers to online journalism in the Kurdistan region, explores the relationship between online journalism and the public sphere and compares the Kurdish situation to that in other emerging democracies. Thus the focus here is on people’s own accounts of situations and viewpoints, to obtain detailed and

accurate data. Therefore, the methodology of this research is based on the basics of case study using a combination of qualitative methods. For data collection and analysis, this study requires utilising three methods, namely, *in-depth interview*, *case study* and *content analysis*. Moreover, the discourse of opinion articles of the independent *Awêne* online news site (*Awene.com*) concerning extending the presidency term of the Kurdistan region's president, in addition to the in-depth interviews, were analysed by using qualitative content analysis. The selection of qualitative methods rather than quantitative ones is due to the fact that the question type and aims of this research are best answered through using these methods, as mentioned in previous sections. The use of quantitative research methods that deal with numbers and statistical analysis of information would not achieve the aims of this study, since such methods cannot usually provide an understanding of meanings, experiences and beliefs and are better comprehended by qualitative information.

3.3 The research strategy and methods

Research strategy is the overall plan regarding how the researcher works to answer the questions of the research. It can be described as the general direction leading the research, including the process of conducting the research (Wedawatta, et al. 2011). According to Platt (1992, p. 46), a case study is "a strategy to be preferred when circumstances and research problems are appropriate rather than an ideological commitment to be followed whatever the circumstances". Although case study as a strategy is valid in itself, it also useful to complement other research methods, such as generating or testing theories or to provide details to researchers. Moreover, it is also valuable specifically when a research context "is too complex for experimental or survey research" (Bloor and Wood, 2006, p. 27).

The following sections outline the research strategy and main methods utilised in this research, considering their major strength aspects and the justification for choosing each of them and then providing an explanation of how each have been used to achieve the aims and objectives of this research.

3.3.1 Case study

The choice of any strategy or method for research depends on three key conditions, namely: the type of research questions posed, the extent of control an investigator has over actual behavioural events and the degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events (Yin, 2003, p. 5). One of the most significant conditions for

distinguishing and selecting a specific strategy/method rather than others is the type of questions posed (Yin, 2009, p. 8; Yin, 2003, p. 5 & 7). For example, when little is known about the topic, only 'what' and 'how' questions can be posed, where later such questions can be developed into "a series of more precise questions" (Swanborn, 2010, p. 17). On the other hand, Yin (2003, p. 6) states that the 'how' and 'why' questions are self-explanatory because they "deal with operational links needing to be traced over time, rather than mere frequencies or incidence". In this current study, 'what' and 'how' questions are the questions that have been posed, as follows:

- 1- What does the content of Kurdish online news sites tell us about the role of online journalism in Kurdistan?
- 2- What is the attitude of journalists, teachers and legislators to online journalism in the region?
- 3- What is the historical context in which Kurdish online journalism has developed?
- 4- How does the Kurdish situation compare to that of other emerging democracies?
- 5- What can the Kurdish example contribute to a wider understanding of the role of online journalism in the public sphere?

Additionally, the topic of this study is a contemporary and controversial phenomenon, not only in the Kurdistan region, but also across all societies and countries with emerging democracies. In the Kurdistan region of Iraq, as an emerging democracy, this topic is relatively new, but as a result of the rapid evolution of online journalism and the Internet, and their on-going day-to-day expansion, this aspect significantly influences people in their real life. Currently more than 20% of the region's 5.3 million population have access to the Internet on a daily basis (PUKmedia, 2014; Xendan, 2014), which can be considered numerous Internet users for such an emerging society. To illustrate, by 31 December 2013, of the total population of 32 million Iraqis, including the Kurdistan region, there were almost 3 million Internet users, which constitutes 9.2% of the population (Internet World Stats, 2014). Considering the 20% proportion of the Kurdistan region, it becomes clear that Internet users are even less than 9.2% in the rest of Iraq. Internet users in the Kurdistan region are informed about the latest news relating to their society events, and ideas and opinions about a variety of issues of common interest. Therefore, this study is an intensive investigation of a

contemporary phenomenon – online journalism in the Kurdistan region. Accordingly, ‘what’ and ‘how’ questions are being asked on a contemporary phenomenon and the researcher has little control, therefore such conditions underpin the use of the case study as a strategy and method in the current research (Swanborn, 2010; Yin, 2003, p. 6).

Case studies focus on the case rather than data collection or analytical processing of data. As Hassanpour (1992, p.37) states, “case studies are distinguished from other research by their concentration on the case rather than a particular form of data gathering, analysis, etc.” Case studies generally include the thorough study of a specific situation of a contemporary phenomenon and are widely used for qualitative research in media and communication. It usually relates to the ethnography, where the aim is to describe and interpret people’s habits and customs and various aspects of culture in their normal situation through using qualitative methods over an extended period of time (Bloor and Wood, 2006, p. 27). Case study is an “empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2009, p.18).

As a research method, case study has its own design that includes some key steps such as the techniques of collecting and analysing pertinent data, in addition to an explanation of a sampling plan. The case study method enables researchers to “retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events- such as individual life cycles, small group behaviour, organizational and managerial processes, neighbourhood change, school performance, international relations, and the maturation of industries” (Yin, 2009, p. 4). In addition, case study research is most important to describe the assumed causal connections in life interventions, as in the current research these are too compound for survey or experimental strategies (Yin, 2009, p. 19). Case studies are used to display information bearing on cause-effect links and to clarify which reasons created which effects (Yin 1993, p. 5). But since such phenomenon and context are not usually distinguishable in real life, case studies depend on other “technical characteristics, including data collection and analysis strategies” (Yin, 2009). In other words, case studies depend on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion and make use of previous developments of theoretical and academic propositions to guide information

gathering and analysis (Yin, 2009, p. 18). Triangulation is considered as an approach that employs more than one method of investigation where multiple observers, theoretical perspectives, sources of data, and methodologies are combined in order to achieve more reliable and valid findings (Bryman, 1988, p. 131; Denzin, 1970, p. 310; Webb, et al., 1966). As such, for the empirical collection of materials, this research project used a multiple method of three research methods, which helped in increasing the reliability of the researcher's results and enabled the management of a wider scope of historical and behavioural subjects and this choice was considered to be one of the strengths of case study investigations. In this case study, primary data from the interviews with the relevant participants presented fundamental information about various aspects of Kurdish media, in particular online journalism and its barriers and influences on freedom of speech. Additionally, the findings from the thematic content analysis of the critical opinion articles, which reflect the extent to which people are allowed to express their critical opinions as a crucial element of freedom of speech, are all used together with related contextual information, including theories, historical and contemporary developments, to gain impact from a wide range of secondary evidence sources. Moreover, the Kurdish media observations helped in gaining information on mainstream news websites, traditional mass media, the process of media production and other aspects (to be explained further in the following sections).

The use of multiple data methods in this qualitative case study for collecting primary and secondary data promoted the accuracy and reliability of the evidence. This also empowered the researcher to deal with a wider range of historical and behavioural issues, but the most important advantage for using multiple sources of evidence was the development of converging lines of inquiry (Yin, 2009, p.115). This ability to use multiple sources is an invaluable advantage of case study methods. Yin (2009, p. 116) determines six sources or techniques of evidence that are commonly used in case studies, which are, *documentation*, *archival records*, *interviews*, *direct observation*, *participant-observation* and *physical artefacts*. These evidence sources are complementary to a great extent, and when many of them are used in a case study this will strengthen the study because each of these evidence sources, when used alone, have their own weaknesses (Yin, 2009, p.101). Using triangulation compensates for the potential weaknesses of using a single method and empowers investigators to minimise the biases that are produced, usually in the case of using one research

method. Besides, researches that rely on multiple methods and generate multiple types of data offer opportunities for comparing and cross-checking the results (Hastings, 2010, p. 1538).

In this case study, the primary data and analysis from the interviews and the critical opinion articles are used together with related theoretical and historical information from a variety of secondary evidence sources. Secondary evidence sources include documentation or document information and archival records relevant to the case study. According to Yin (2009, p. 102), documentation can come in many forms, such as memoranda, e-mail correspondence, agendas, announcements and minutes of meetings, written reports of events, administrative documents, studies of the same subject as the researcher's study, and news and articles appearing in the newspapers. The documents are very significant and have a direct role in data collection for any case study. They provide further details to confirm and support data from other sources. Besides, they help to ensure the correct spellings, titles and names of organisations that might be mentioned in an interview, and in the meantime, researchers can make inferences to the documents (Yin, 2009, p. 103).

Archival records are another source of evidence that can be used in conjunction with other sources of data for case studies, and may include public use files, service records, geographical maps and charts, organisational records and survey data (Yin, 2009, p. 105). Interviews, on the other hand, are essential and one of the most important sources of information for case studies, because case studies mostly investigate human affairs and real-life phenomena. Therefore, well-informed interviewees can offer significant accurate insights into these affairs and a shorter avenue to data that benefits researchers by helping to pinpoint and recognise other sources of information (the use of interviews, as a tool for collecting data in the case study, will be addressed in more detail in later sections). Another source of evidence is participant-observation, which means that the investigator is not only a passive observer, but directly participates in the events of the study and also assumes some roles in the case study situation. This source of evidence may offer an important opportunity for collecting data, but this depends on the researcher's ability to get access to groups and situations related to the research that are otherwise inaccessible (Yin, 2009, p. 111-112). In the current case study, this source of evidence has benefitted the process of data collection and the correction and evaluation of such

data, since the researcher has assumed some roles in journalism in the context of the study and has a relevant background that enabled him to get access to the pertinent information and people.

On the other hand, having an analytical strategy in any case study is very useful because this enables the researcher to benefit from the tools to a high extent and, consequently, it helps to “treat the evidence fairly, produce compelling analytic conclusions, and rule out alternative interpretations” (Yin, 2009, p. 130). Having such a strategy is also useful for enabling the researcher to use tools and make manipulations effectively and to be sure that the data will be analysable. Yin (2009, p. 130-136) identified four main strategies necessary for researchers to follow in a case study so they can achieve their aims. The first and most preferred strategy is following and relying on theoretical propositions that led to the case study. The key aims and design of case studies are based on these propositions, which include a range of research questions, a literature review and new propositions. Relying on propositions is particularly significant because this assists researchers to concentrate on specific and required information, to organise the whole case study, and to examine other explanations. The current case study relied also on such theoretical propositions and a wide range of literature pertinent to the topic, especially theories that focus on the Internet as a medium from the public sphere, participation and media in an emerging democracy. The second analytical strategy for case studies is developing a descriptive framework for arranging the case study systematically. This helps as an alternative when a researcher has difficulty in making the first strategy. In this case study, the researcher collected a lot of data about the historical aspect of Kurdish media, its landscape and they have been provided in the context of the research. The third strategy is using both qualitative and quantitative data in a way that qualitative data remains central to the case study, but meanwhile essential statistical analysis can be used. The researcher also resorted to the use of a range of statistical data collected from secondary sources, such as that from official, professional and academic reports and documents, in order to support the primary qualitative data collected from the interviews. The fourth and final strategy, is defining and testing rival explanations, which according to Yin works with all of the previous three strategies, where “initial theoretical propositions (the first strategy) might have included rival hypotheses; the contrasting perspectives of participants and stakeholders may produce rival descriptive

framework (the second strategy); and data from comparison groups may cover rival conditions to be examined as a part of using both quantitative and qualitative data (the third strategy)” (Yin, 2009, p. 134-135).

3.3.2 Content analysis

This is another method that has been utilised in this research project. It is a broadly used qualitative research tool to analyse information from texts and documents (Hsieh and Shannon (2005). It compresses large amounts of texts and documents into a small number of content categories depending on clear rules of coding (Stemler, 2001). It is a research tool “for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context” and includes particular measures for dealing with information in order to produce “knowledge, new insights, a representation of ‘facts’, and a practical guide to action” (Krippendorff, 1980, p. 21).

In communications studies, this method enables researchers to observe communication of public content at times and places chosen by the researcher himself (Macmillan et al. 1967, p. 2). According to Berelson (1952, p. 18) content analysis initially is “a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication”. This definition describes this method as quantitative only; however, it can be qualitative also. Scholars believe that content analysis can be qualitative and many current researches use this method as qualitative. For instance, Gunter (2000, p. 82) states that there is an increasing use of this method in media researches relying on an interpretive style. Moreover, Hsieh and Shannon (2005, p. 1278), define content analysis as a qualitative method of research, stating that it is “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns”. Similarly, Mayring (2000, p. 2) describes content analysis as “an approach of empirical, methodological controlled analysis of texts within their context of communication, following content analytical rules and step by step models, without rash quantification”. This means that, content analysis is also qualitative and goes beyond only counting words to “examine meanings, themes and patterns that may be manifest or latent in a particular text” and assist investigators to understand social reality in a subjective but systematic and logical way (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009, p. 1).

In fact, content analysis as a method has been criticised by scholars for having weak points especially as Hansen (1998, p. 95) states, it cannot be objective and does not analyse everything in the content, because the analysis usually begins by delineating certain aspects of the content and the choices for this purpose are influenced by the investigator's own decision and experience. However, since this method is purely descriptive and cannot directly explain media impact, it is usually used in conjunction with other methods (Gunter, 2000, p. 69), as in the case of this research.

Nevertheless, through this method not only is the manifest content of the message analysed, but also latent meanings behind the components of the content can be analysed, therefore, one of the strengths of this method especially for case studies is "the way it tries to synthesize openness—as claimed by the qualitative research paradigm—and theory-guided investigation—usually demanded by the hypothetical-deductive paradigm" (Kohlbacher, 2006, p. 24). It is also controlled methodologically and the process of analysing the content is step by step. These two strengths enhance the qualitative content analysis's ability in handling and reducing the complexity of the social situations investigated and social information material obtained from them (Kohlbacher, 2006, p. 24). Therefore, for the current study the researcher carried out thematic qualitative content analysis in order to identify and provide an examination and interpretation for the major themes, patterns and meanings of the content of opinion articles that may be manifest (directly observable in the information) or latent (underlying the situation or phenomenon).

3.3.2.1 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis provides purely qualitative detailed data (Vaismoradi, et al., 2013, p. 400) and it is an independent approach that is widely relied upon in qualitative analysis by researchers, since it is flexible, simple and less time-consuming.

Thematic analysis is a process for encoding qualitative information. The encoding requires explicit "codes." This may be a list of themes; a complex model with themes, indicators, and qualifications that are casually related; or something in between these two forms. A theme is a pattern found in the information that at the minimum describes and organizes possible observations or at the maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 4).

One of the significances of this approach specifically is that it allows researchers, observers and participants to use a broad variety of categories of data methodically, which enhances their accuracy in understanding, explaining and interpreting

observations about phenomena, situations, people, events and organisations. It also enables investigators in qualitative research to more simply communicate their explanations, results and interpretation of meanings to other investigators who use different methods and this, in turn, helps in a broader understanding of the situation (Boyatzis, 1998, p.5-6), and provides a rich and detailed report of the data (Vaismoradi, et al., 2013, p. 400).

A theme of such analysis, which relies on the coder to identify certain ideas or themes from the text (Beardsworth, 1980, p. 375 cited in Deacon et al., 1999, p. 119), captures something significant about the information related to the research questions and “represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 82). It is a content analysis unit, which also refers to a simple sentence particularly to subject and predicate and it is an assertion about a subject (Berelson, 1952, p. 138).

The theme is one of the most valuable content analysis units for investigating the effects of media and communication because it “takes the form in which issues and attitudes are usually discussed” (Berelson, 1952, p. 139), and it can be generated in two different ways: deductively (theory driven and prior research driven) and inductively (driven from the raw information). The latter, which has been applied in this thesis, appears with words and syntax of the content and the researcher interprets their meanings after gaining the findings (Boyatzis, 1998, p.30). In the current study, the coding process involved decoding and segmenting the raw information from the sample and then reorganising them in major themes so their meanings could be easily interpreted by the researcher.

3.3.2.2 Sample of thematic analysis

Berelson (1952, p. 176) identifies three steps for media content analysis sampling. First is selecting the titles from the media (i.e. specific media form such as newspaper, TV, magazine, online news site and so on) according to the research subject. Second, selecting the issues or dates of the titles, and finally selecting the relevant content within particular issues of particular titles. As such, in the current study, thematic qualitative content analysis was employed to analyse the discourse of opinion articles of a Kurdish independent mainstream news website, which is *Awêne* online news site. This was done in order to examine and highlight the main themes of the opinions published on a specific event – the extension of the presidency term of the Kurdistan

region's president on 30 June 2013. These articles were written by a variety of Kurdish writers, journalists and anonymous writers and published by this news site intensely in the two weeks following the Kurdistan parliament approving the extension. This topic was chosen because on the one hand it led to a widespread debate reflected in the media channels, especially mainstream news sites. On the other hand, the focus of the debate was on the pinnacle of power in the Kurdistan region, which shows the extent to which people are allowed and have the right to express their opinion freely. In these opinion articles, severe criticism in various ways was directed to the pinnacle of power in the Kurdistan region, either to the president, who represents the supreme executive power, the Kurdistan parliament, which represents the supreme legislative authority, and/or to the two ruling political parties at that period of time. The researcher chose the independent (private sector) mainstream news website rather than a partisan one, because these websites are supposed to be more open and free with fewer restrictions on publishing opinions and journalistic materials. Whereas in contrast, partisan media including their mainstream news websites affiliated to either the ruling political parties or the opposition ones, have political interests that employ a more restricted media policy and limitations on publishing journalistic materials, including opinion articles.

3.3.2.3 Case study: *Awêne* news

Awêne news (Awene.com) is an independent news site operated by *Awêne* Company for Press and Publishing, and was established in January 2006. This online news site operates in Kurdish and Arabic languages from Sulaymaniyah city in the Kurdistan region, but publishes news from throughout greater Kurdistan and the Kurdish diaspora. This news site has three news editors, in addition to the editor-in-chief and they are paid between £220 and £350 monthly. The company is from the private sector that also publishes a weekly printed newspaper entitled *Awêne* (mirror) and a magazine entitled *Awênekan* (mirrors). It covers a wide range of news and topics including political affairs, economics, social, sports and entertainment. Furthermore, the news site is ranked among the most viewed Kurdish websites in Iraq, according to Alexa.com.

The majority of the supervisory body of this company are the staff who published the first Kurdish independent newspaper of *Hawllatî* (citizenship) in 2000. The selection of *Awêne* news by the researcher as a sample for conducting content analysis, rather than other independent online news sites was due to several factors.

For example, besides being independent, it also has a proper archive section of opinion articles (since December 2011) on the basis of date, which enabled the researcher to easily collect the related opinion articles for the selected subject and period of time. Another reason is that Asos Hardî, the director of the *Awêne* Company, who is also a known journalist, was awarded the Gebran Tueni Award, the annual prize of the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) in 2009 for being a truly independent media outlet in the Kurdistan region and functioning professionally, in addition to their remarkable contribution in enhancing independent media in the region. Moreover, Hardî was also assaulted and beaten by gunmen in August 2011 due to reasons relating to his work (WAN-IFRA, 2012; CPJ, 2011). On the other hand, Serdar Muhammad the editor-in-chief of *Awêne* newspaper was nominated by the Reporters Without Borders as one of the 100 information heroes in the world in 2014, for their newspaper's contribution in promoting the freedom to seek, collect and spread information and ideas through media, regardless of frontiers (Reporters Without Borders, 2014a). These reasons and others have made the media outlets of this company, especially *Awêne online*, some of the most popular independent media channels in the Kurdistan region having significant audiences and impact.

3.3.2.4 Themes coding

In the two weeks following the parliament's decision to extend another term for the president (from 30 June to 14 July 2014), *Awêne* online news site published 28 opinion articles. After reading all of these articles thoroughly, the researcher found that 11 articles were completely or partially focused on this topic and all of them were critical.

For developing inductively derived or data derived thematic codes, several steps need to be taken. Braun and Clarke (2006) and Boyatzis (1998, p.45-51) point out that thematic analysis, as with any other research method, can be conducted through several steps where some are similar to the phases of conducting other qualitative analysis. For this purpose, Braun and Clarke (2006) identify six phases, as follows:

- 1- Becoming familiar with the data
- 2- Generating initial codes
- 3- Searching for themes
- 4- Reviewing themes
- 5- Defining and naming themes

6- Producing the report

As such, the researcher summarised and highlighted all paragraphs and sentences of the articles that focused on the topic, so the raw data could be in a form that allowed easy repeated review. This led to developing several preliminary themes, but after reviewing them on several occasions, comparing and identifying their similarities, they were reduced to five main themes as follows:

- 1- Illegitimate president
- 2- Dictatorship authority
- 3- Corruption
- 4- Calls to take stand
- 5- Violation of human rights

3.3.3 The interview

This is one of the most important methods of collecting information for qualitative case studies. Interviews, as Yin (2009, p. 108) states, are “an essential source of case study evidence because most case studies are about human affairs or behavioural events”. In-depth interviews are a type of case study interview, which according to Yin (2009, p.102-106), allows the researcher to ask the interviewees main questions about their views and perceptions of the facts of an issue, in order to obtain causal clarifications. In this method, participants are allowed to talk in-depth about the issue under study (Cook, 2008, p. 422). This qualitative research method “involves intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation” (Boyce and Neale, 2006, p. 3).

In-depth interviews are commonly used in qualitative researches and are the most proper method when the researcher intends to ask open-ended questions, which obtain deep information from a relatively small number of relevant people. The major advantage of this type of method is that it enables the interviewer to deeply investigate the respondents’ viewpoints and feelings on specific subjects through discussion that eventually leads to rich and detailed related information and knowledge, which also helps in forming additional questions pertinent to the topic (Guion, et al., 2011; Priest, 1996, p. 107). Moreover, it allows respondents to share their views and feelings without bias from other participants since this type of interview is on a one-to-one basis. Another advantage is that it offers a more

comfortable atmosphere in collecting data because people usually feel more comfortable having a conversation with the interviewer about their experiences and situations, instead of filling out a survey form (Boyce, 2006 p. 3).

In-depth interviews can be categorised into three major types. According to Gill, et al. (2008, p.291) and Cook (2008, p. 422) these types are structured, unstructured and semi-structured interviews. In structured interviews, there is little or no space for flexibility for follow-up questions to answers that lead to further explanation by the respondents about the topic, since they are only allowed to answer pre-defined closed questions. As such, conducting of these interviews is relatively fast and easily managed. Whereas on the other hand, the essence of an unstructured interview lies in the open-ended questions and does not reflect any preconceived ideas; they are conducted with little or no planning. The other type of interview is semi-structured, which is a combination of structured and unstructured interviews. This type is usually made up of a number of main open-ended questions that assist in determining the areas to be investigated and explained with a flexibility that allows the respondent to have the opportunity to follow an idea or answer in more detail. This type of interview is commonly used since it offers respondents some guidance and clues on the axis of the interview and what they are focusing on, while the researcher retains some control over the direction and the subjects to be discussed. Moreover, it has the flexibility to allow for further information and explanations, which is important for enriching the research.

In order to collect data about mainstream news sites in the Kurdistan region, its role on freedom of speech and common problems, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted individually and face-to-face between the researcher and 13 of the most relevant individuals to this research topic. The researcher used direct interviews with the pertinent participants in order to gain valuable primary information, because this method also enables an investigator to understand participants' viewpoints on their situations and experiences in their own words and expressions (Bertrand and Hughes, 2005). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, since the purpose is to describe and interpret individual and group behaviours and customs in their natural settings, the focus should be entirely on those who are most likely involved in or influenced by the phenomenon and the topic of research. The groups of interviewees (to be outlined in the following section) were chosen because they are the most relevant to the

subject of the thesis and understand in detail the development of the Kurdish media, common barriers to Kurdish media and online journalism, effects of online journalism on freedom of speech exercised by Internet users in the region, and other relevant aspects. Moreover, choosing media makers and experts, rather than the audience, was due to the fact that on the one hand they are much more involved in the process of media production. On the other hand, they are familiar and have knowledge of the development and challenges of the Kurdish media and the process of publishing, and their influences on this aspect.

All of the 13 interviewees have roles, experiences and backgrounds in online and other types of journalism, and have significant influence on the subject of the research through their practices. This relatively small sample size was chosen because in qualitative case studies the focus is on in-depth understanding of a phenomenon and its natural context (Darke, et al., 1998; Maykut and Morehouse, 1994). This means that qualitative researches tend to use relatively small sample sizes for achieving their aims (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994, p. 63).

3.3.3.1 Participants of interviews

The participants of the interviews, all experienced journalists, consist of three main groups. First, independent journalists working for mainstream news websites and other traditional outlets. There were five interviewees in this group as such - Eñmed Reşîd Mîre editor-in-chief of *Lvîn* magazine and *Lvinpress* online news site (Lvinpress.com), Dana Es'ed editor-in-chief of *Awêne* online news site (Awene.com), Kemal Reuf director of *Shar* (city) Company, which publishes *Shar* magazine and operates *Sharpress* online news site (Sharpress.net). Also, Nyaz 'Ebdulla reporter and programme presenter at Radio *Newa* and Serdar Muñemed editor-in-chief of *Awêne* newspaper. The biographical details of these interviewees can be found in Appendix 5, and their interview transcripts can be found in Appendices 6.1, 6.2, 6.7, 6.9 and 6.11.

The second group consists of journalists who work for mainstream news websites and other traditional outlets affiliated to the political parties (ruling or opposition parties). This group consisted of three participants: Hëyder Cemîl Mñemed Sallñ editor-in-chief of *KurdIU.org* online news site affiliated to the Kurdistan Islamic Union, which was an opposition party in the period when the interview was conducted. Hana Şwan Hësen editor-in-chief of *Rêwan* (guide) newspaper, which is affiliated to PUK,

one of the ruling parties, she is a member of the higher committee of KJS-Sulaymaniyah branch, and finally, Sîrwan Xerîb Eħmed editor-in-chief of *Xendan.org* online news site is affiliated to a senior official of the PUK. Detailed biographies of these interviewees can also be found in Appendix 5, and their interview transcripts in Appendices 6.3, 6.4 and 6.13.

The third group of participants consist of media academics and trainers in the Kurdistan region who are also experienced journalists. The interviewees of this group were: Hevall Ebubekir, lecturer in the media department at the University of Sulaymaniyah and supervisor of the academic magazine for the humanitarian science, Sara Qadir lecturer in the media department of Sulaymaniyah University and journalist at *Awêne* newspaper. Şwan Muħmed AFP correspondent, trainer and director of the independent *Spee* (white) Company for media training, which publishes *Spee* magazine and operates *speemedia* online news site (speemedia.com), Hiwa Osman a blogger, media trainer, developer and consultant, and director of *Mediwawan* foundation for media training, and finally Khaled Sulaiman journalist, columnist and lead trainer of media. For detailed biographies of these interviewees see Appendix 5, and their interview transcripts can be found in Appendices 6.5, 6.10, 6.12, 6.6 and 6.8.

3.3.3.2 Ethical issues in interviews

Regarding the ethical issues of the research, the investigator contacted the interviewees through email and/or phone call before the interviews were conducted. In this contact, the researcher introduced himself, the topic and purpose of the study and the interview, why the participant had been chosen, the period that the interview may take and the main issues and questions that would be discussed in the interview. For the latter point, the researcher described some of the major questions for the interview, and for some sent the list of questions by email.

The conducting of qualitative interviews begins with a schedule or guide list that consists of the most significant subjects or questions that will be asked in the conversation (Priest, 1996, p. 108). As such, the first part involved introducing the topic and issue of the study to create a proper atmosphere for starting the interview. During the interview, the researcher carried out several tasks such as careful listening to the answers, observing and guiding the conversations, and writing down notes until all of the questions were discussed. At the end of the interview, the researcher asked

each interviewee if there was anything else they would like to add regarding the topic of the study, and then thanked them for their participation and time for the interview.

It should also be noted that all of the interviews were conducted in the Kurdish language from 17 July to 2 September 2013 in both Sulaymaniyah and Erbil cities. The researcher obtained permission to use the interviews for the study and to take photos of the participants. He also recorded all of the interviews on an audiotape and digital recorder after getting permission, and once the interviews were conducted, the answers were transcribed and then translated by the researcher into English.

3.3.3.3 Questions in the interviews

The open-ended questions, despite focusing on the main issue of the research, were associated with various aspects of the Kurdish media, such as the development of the Kurdish media, the role and effects of media outlets, relationships between journalists and officials, credibility and professionalism, obstacles and barriers to journalists, the role of academic departments and professional organisations, regulations in the media and many others. Several were asked only to help in developing and clarifying other questions, in addition to encouraging participants for further involvement with the researcher so as to gain the required answers and data. The answers collected from these questions, which stem from the personal experiences and viewpoints of the interviewees, offered the researcher rich and detailed data on various aspects of the Kurdish media, since there are no reliable sources about the main questions of the study.

Overall, the set of questions, which stemmed from the researcher's observations and reading of secondary sources, comprised three main sections which were prepared to be put to the interviewees. The first section of questions consisted of general questions about the media in the Kurdistan region. The key purpose of these questions was to collect general information about different aspects of the reality of the Kurdish media, which provided rich data to the researcher in these aspects. However, not all of the answers in this section were used in the research, because some were asked only to help in developing and clarifying other questions as mentioned. To illustrate, questions (1,2,3, 10,11, 13,14,17,18,19,21) were among these questions that were asked only for these purposes. This section included 22 questions (numbered 1-22).

The second section was devoted to general queries about online journalism in the Kurdistan region, in particular, its development, barriers and regulation. This section consisted of 15 questions (numbered 23 -37) and some answers (24, 26, 31, 34, 35 and 36) of this section were also not used in the research for the reasons mentioned. The questions of the third and final section focused on the role of online journalism in freedom of expression and democracy in the Kurdistan region. This consisted of 10 questions (numbered 38-47). Similarly, the answers of questions 40 and 47 were not used in this research because of the reasons mentioned (see Appendix 6).

To summarise, from the 47 key questions that were asked to the 13 interviewees, 28 questions have been used for different chapters of this thesis project and 19 were not used because they were only asked to develop and clarify other questions, and to motivate the interviewees for more involvement with the researcher to obtain the required information.

Chapter 4: Iraq and the Kurdistan region in transition

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive understanding of the development of media in Iraq and the situation of media work in the past and present through investigating media regulations and the new socio-political system of this country. It will also examine the socio-political system in the Kurdistan region in light of the political and legislative climate post 2003. Since the creation of Iraq, from the family of *Vilayet* of Mosul, Baghdad and Basra in 1920 and because of the defeat of the armies of the Ottoman Empire during the First World War, this artificial country has seen many phases of instability in terms of its political situation. As a result, it has encountered various ruling systems including monarchical, one party, military dictatorship and finally democratic. In addition, the result of war, both internally and externally, has affected the situation in this country. Thus, Iraq has faced significant and lengthy periods of instability, as a result the proper development of the country has been impeded; this is surprising for a country that is so rich in natural resources. All of these instabilities have therefore had a profound effect on various aspects of societal life and the sectors of media and culture appear to have been most prominently affected by these instabilities.

In addition to the fragile political situation, the press in Iraq has also faced difficulties despite its introduction to the area in 1869. This chapter aims to identify and explain the major political transitions and changes affecting Iraq's political situation and its media developments. Consequently, it will explain how the state controlled its media outlets prior to the coalition invasion in 2003. Since then, there has been a significant media boom with the establishment of the interim authority in Iraq – the “Coalition Provisional Authority” (CPA) – by the coalition forces. The CPA has since played a crucial role in rebuilding and regulating the media and mass communication in Iraq. In general, this chapter will explain how the media situation in Iraq is directly linked, historically, to the political situation in the region.

The Kurdistan region, as an official part of Iraq, inherited a deep legacy from the Ba'athist regime. It has witnessed several general elections and media diversities since it became self-ruling in 1991, however, it is still facing inherited problems from the

previous regimes. Ultimately, this chapter aims to explain the political situation of Iraqi Kurdistan, as an autonomous region created in 1991 that has experienced many difficult phases. Various subjects will be explained in an attempt to provide a better understanding of the Kurdish media and any problems that it is facing; in particular, the following subjects will be considered: human rights, minority rights, the situation for journalists and freedom of speech within this region.

4.2 Political systems and media in Iraq: past and present

The First World War significantly affected the Ottomans as many were banished from various areas in the Middle East by the allied forces. In addition, new countries emerged because of new political relationships; these relationships influenced other areas across the rest of the world. To illustrate this further, one of these new countries was Iraq, this can be described as “an artificial British creation”, founded in 1920 (Stansfield, 2005, p.134). This country assembled various nations, religions, sectarians and territories, including Shi’ite Arabs, Sunni Arabs, Kurds, Christians, Jews as well as others (Marr, 2012; Stansfield, 2005, p.134). In an attempt to create a political system responsible for managing Iraq’s affairs, Marr (2012, p.24) acknowledges that, in 1921, the British established a monarchical system in Iraq under the following direct mandate:

The first decisive step in creating the institutions and structure of the new Iraqi state and the British role in it took place at the Cairo Conference of 1921. It was here that the three pillars of the Iraqi state were conceived: the monarchy, in the person of Faisal, the third son of the Sharif of Mecca; the treaty, the legal basis for Britain’s rule; and the constitution, designed to integrate elements of the population under a democratic formula. All three were [therefore] intertwined.

Thus, on 27 August 1921, the British introduced King Faisal as the king of Iraq. However, this new system only lasted until 1958, during this monarchical reign various stages of instability occurred because of political unrest and military confrontation between the Kurdish nationalist movement’s rebels and British and Iraqi troops. This was in addition to challenges toward the dominance of the Sunnis’ rule by Shi’ite rebels, which were because of sectarian reasons (Stansfield, 2005, p.137).

The press in Iraq had a significant impact on political and social aspects prior to and throughout monarchical Iraq. According to Dawisha (2009), in the early twentieth century, the press had an important societal role, especially during monarchical rule

when the British mandate and the monarchy of the Iraqi Palace sponsored periodicals. In contrast, during this time, the opposition parties launched their own press to publish their own visions about various aspects of life within the country. For the opposition parties, newspapers were a vital tool utilised to publicise their thoughts and programmes, they also criticised the government by publishing certain demands. To illustrate, Dawisha (2009, p.63) explains:

Articles and editorials critical of governmental policies and personalities were a staple of Iraq's media output from the very beginning of the monarchical period. In fact, as early as the outset of the 20th century, the press would play a major role in shifting the attitudes of the literate segment of the population away from unquestioning acceptance of absolutism as a political and religious duty.

When the British entered Iraq, during the First World War, they soon took control of the printing houses in Basra, Baghdad and later in Mosul. They then began circulating periodicals in different languages, across many parts of Iraq, promising a prosperous era for the press and allowing criticism for opposition views and opinions. This British trend was reflected in later periodicals published during the monarchical rule and Britain mandate. According to Dawisha (2009, p.63), the British mandate in the 1920s generated significant press and developed whereby the periodicals in Iraq would publish articles detailing different views and even criticising the monarchical system of Iraq and the British mandate for the way in which they dealt with Iraqis and the manner in which they controlled Iraq. Furthermore, even Iraqi journalists believed that the period of the direct British mandate was much better than Iraqi independence after 1932 (Dawisha, 2009, p.64). More importantly, as Dawisha (2009, p.59) states, the Iraqi constitution approved in 1924 provided many rights for the people, including:

The constitutional document, known as the Basic Law, that was ratified by the Constituent Assembly in 1924 was modeled on the British political system, and as such provided for many of the civil liberties that would be found in Britain. Foremost among these were the rights of free expression, publication, assembly, and the forming and joining of political parties within the law.

In the period following the independence of 1932, the Iraqi press expanded significantly and many new newspapers and magazines were circulated, including: *Sawt Al-Sha'b* (The Voice of the People) in 1934; *Al-Eslaḥ* (The Reform) in 1935; *Azzaman* (Time) in 1937; *Fetat Al-Iraq* (The Girl of Iraq) in 1936; *Al-Exbar* (The News) in 1938; *Al-Mecele* (The Magazine) in 1938, as well as others. However, the prosecution

of many journalists and intellectuals occurred because of the opinions published within them, this resulted in the abolishment of various periodicals for criticising the authorities. By the start of the Second World War, in 1939, the Iraqi authority had officially prohibited some political parties within the country; as a result, their periodicals were closed down and only a few periodicals remained in circulation (El-Ke'bî, 2010).

It is also valuable to note that in the period prior to British mandate, when the Ottomans ruled over Iraq, many newspapers and magazines were issued. The three *Vilayets* of Baghdad, Basra and Mosul circulated numerous newspapers, most of which were official mouthpieces for the Ottoman authorities, as they tended to publish predominantly government instructions and statements. For instance, when the first printing press was established in Iraq in 1869, the Ottoman authorities in Iraq circulated the first newspaper, entitled *Al-Zawra* in June 1869, in Turkish and Arabic; this newspaper published formal government statements and news (Fattah and Caso, 2009, p.144; Elrrawî, 1978, p.8). However, the Constitutionalist Revolution of the Ottoman Empire in 1908 accelerated the progress of the press across all empire territories, since it led to reduced restrictions on the press. Consequently, the Iraqi people, like other nations in the empire, benefited from declining censorship and better conditions for the press. To illustrate, within the three *Vilayets*, many Iraqis founded newspapers and magazines. Fattah and Caso (2009, p.145) argue that at the time of the downfall of the Ottoman Empire, almost 36 newspapers and magazines were in circulation by the *Vilayets*, individual Iraqis and foreigners intellectuals. For example, *Al-Riyadh* was a weekly newspaper that appeared in 1910, this was owned by Suleyman Al-Dakhil – an Arab journalist. Other newspapers, such as *Al-Raqib* (The Monitor), *Sada Babil* (The Babylon Voice) and *Al-Nada* (The Dew) were published by Muslim Arabs and Christians in the aftermath of the Constitutionalist Revolution. Some of which lasted a few years and some lasted until the expulsion of the Ottomans in 1918.

As has already been mentioned, throughout the twentieth century, and to the present day, Iraq has encountered various ruling systems, including monarchical rule, republican rule, totalitarian rule, one party rule, military dictatorship and a democratic system. Many of these ruling systems ended with significant and bloody internal conflict or by external powers. To illustrate this further, the monarchy system lasted

for 37 years, ending on 14 July 1958, when a group of Iraqi army officers in a bloody coup executed the royal family, including King Faisal II and the regent Emir Abdul Illah (Marr, 2012, p.81; Fattah and Caso, 2009, p.186-187; Polk, 2005; Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett 2003, p.49). At this time, the coup group leader, Abd Al-Karim Qasim, announced a republican system for Iraq. Moreover, Abd Al-Karim Qasim's rule ended by a similar coup that was conducted by a group of Ba'athist officers/Iraqi army on 8 February 1963. This led to the execution of Qasim and a number of his associates the day after the coup (Marr, 2012, p.115-116). Likewise, the Ba'athist rule did not last the year. On 18 November 1963, Abd Al-Salam Arif, the highest officer within the Iraqi army, led a coup against the Ba'athist regime and announced a new government (Marr 2012, p.122). Again, the government did not last long as Abd Al-Salam died on 13 April 1966 when his presidential helicopter crashed in mysterious circumstances in southern Iraq. The National Defence Council of Iraq elected Arif's brother, Abd Al-Rahman Arif as the new president of Iraq on 17 April 1966, he was removed by another coup only a short while later on 17 July 1968 where he was then sent into exile (Marr 2012, p.129/135; Anderson and Stansfield, 2004, p.40). The Ba'athist party conducted this coup, which resulted in them again being in power, as Marr (2012, 138) states:

The coup of 17 July 1968 shortly brought the Ba'ath Party to full power and inaugurated another, more permanent change in the structure and orientation of government in Iraq. This time the key Ba'ath leaders implemented the kind of regime they had failed to achieve in 1963, and they managed to hold on to power, by draconian means, for the remainder of the century.

All regimes that ruled after the monarchy's era resorted to violence to silence their opponents. Anderson and Stansfield (2004, p.43) state that in the post-monarchy rule years, the state has systematically used organised violence to deal with opponents and to maintain their power. Nevertheless, the period of Ba'athist rule over Iraq, which lasted for almost 35 years and includes the period in which Saddam Hussein arrived to power in 1979, is considered to be the bloodiest era of Iraq's history (Bengio, 1998, p.10).

The Ba'athist regime, less than two years after coming to power in March 1970, achieved an agreement with the Iraqi Kurdish revolution's leadership which ended the war between the Iraqi army and the Kurdish force of *Peshmerga*. This agreement provided the Kurdish people with some initial rights, such as the recognition of the

Kurdish language as a formal language in the Kurdish territories, the open publishing of periodicals, and the agreement that Kurds could participate in the ruling of Iraq as well as a self-ruling administration for Kurds in the Kurdish provinces. However, except for some cultural rights, Kurdish political and economic demands were not implemented (Marr, 2012, p.152; O'Shea, 2004, p.47).

Interestingly, when the Iraqi army had better fighting abilities, they once again began fighting with Kurdish forces in the north; the Iraqi forces quickly took control of all of the Kurdish major cities, such as Erbil, Kirkuk and Sulaymaniyah. In the meantime, the Ba'athist regime started an Arabisation programme in many Kurdish areas, especially in the Kirkuk and Mosul governorates (Marr, 2012, p.153). Fighting between the Kurds and the Iraqi army continued until 1988 when the Ba'athist army increased their power by deploying chemical weapons and by conducting a genocide campaign against the Kurds (O'Shea, 2004, p.51-167). The Iraqi regime was continuing to suppress the Shi'ites in the south, despite expelling them into Iran (Marr, 2012), and by September 1980, Saddam Hussein, after one year of being the president of the country, launched a war against Iran (the Iran/Iraq War) which lasted for eight years and resulted in more than one million deaths, on both sides (Fattah and Caso, 2009, p. 219; Nissen and Peter, 2009, p.159).

Another aggressive action of Saddam Hussein's regime took place when his army invaded Kuwait, its southern neighbour, on 2 August 1990. This action led to the imposition of international economic and political sanctions over Iraq. The United Nations permitted the International Coalition to use force if the Iraqi regime did not withdraw its army from Kuwait (Dawisha, 2009, p.224-225; Astarjian, 2007, p.165). Nonetheless, the Iraqi army remained in Kuwait. Saddam Hussein then faced the international community and the United Nations in an attempt to find a resolution. As a result, on 16 January 1991, the International Coalition forces launched the war aimed at liberating Kuwait; by 28 February, the Coalition forces succeeded in removing the Iraqi army in just six weeks (Nissen and Peter, 2009, p.159). Tens of thousands of Iraqi troops and citizens died in this war and the intensive air strikes ruined the country's infrastructure. Furthermore, only days after the Iraqi defeat in Kuwait, popular uprisings erupted in the south and north of the country. In the south, Shi'ite uprisings occurred in many cities in an attempt to remove the regime's oppression, but the Iraqi Republican Guards quickly implemented brutal operations and military attacks on the

Shi'ite people and rebels. These uprisings finally led to the restoration of Ba'athist control over the cities in the south. Furthermore, these operations resulted in the Ba'athist army killing between 30,000 and 100,000 people, and more than 70,000 fled to Iran (Marr 2012, p.232; Dawisha, 2009, p.226). Similarly, in the Kurdish territories in the north of Iraq, there were Kurdish uprisings against the Ba'athist regime, in less than three weeks these uprisings liberated most of the Kurdish cities, However, quick and brutal attacks by the Iraqi army eventually led the Ba'athist army to restore its control over the major cities in the north. The Ba'athist army's actions led to the death of thousands and a mass exodus of almost two million Kurds to the Iranian and Turkish borders because of fears over the possible use of chemical weapons by the Iraqi army (Marr, 2012, p.232; Dawisha, 2009, p.226). Saddam Hussein's regime performed multiple crimes against humanity, against the people within the country and against their neighbouring countries.

It should be noted that the media in Iraq, during these coups and military conflicts, was as unstable as the political situation. According to El-Ke'bî (2010), the emergence of the new Iraqi system, after the monarchy's rule, provided an opportunity in which the press in the country could develop in terms of its form and content. However, this prosperous period only lasted until April 1964 with the issuance of the Law of Publications, which cancelled the licensing of all newspapers and magazines that were not government periodicals. Furthermore, by 1967, due to other legislation issued by the General Foundation of Press and Printing in Iraq, the government subjected all periodicals to its control and censorship by nationalising the media. Despite the introduction of only government periodicals, a number of overt periodicals were still circulated by individuals and educational institutions in an attempt to parallel the government's policies (Awad and Eaton, 2013). In terms of the broadcasting media, the situation was even worse. The few TV and radio stations operated were in line with the Iraqi government's policies. Since the emergence and launch of the radio in Iraq in 1936 (El-Rrawî, 1991, p.10-27) and television broadcasting in 1956 (Awad and Eaton, 2013, p.7-8; El-Rrawî, 1991, p.106), and until the overthrow of the Ba'athist regime in 2003, these two mass media resources were operated exclusively by the government. Overall, as identified by El-Se'd (2011); from 1968 to 2003 the media policy in Iraq was exploited to specifically serve the regime's goals. Moreover, there were only three terrestrial TV stations and one satellite TV: *Iraq Satellite Channel*, *Al-IraqTV*, *El-*

ShebabTV (The Youth) and TV2; five newspapers: *El-Thewre* (The Revolution), *El-Cimhuriye* (The Republic), *Iraq*, *El-Qadisiye* and *Babil* (Babylon); a few weekly magazines and a few Kurdish government newspapers, including: *Iraq*, *Hawkarî* (Cooperation) and *Aso* (Horizon); and, a couple of radio stations that were all owned by the state.

Overall, the worst period for the media in Iraq was during the Ba'athist regime's ruling. In particular, from when Saddam Hussein seized power formally in 1979, at this time a cruel military dictator took control of the country and the situation worsened further. The Ba'athist regime firmly controlled all media outlets; furthermore, the laws in this period largely restricted other expressions. To illustrate, Price et al. (2007, p.19) acknowledge:

Until 2003, the media in Iraq was subject to draconian state control. The government and the state's Ba'ath Party tightly controlled and owned all news agencies and broadcast media, and the sole mission of the Iraqi News Agency and the Iraqi press was to relay state propaganda. Systematic suppression of any alternative voices was the norm and all indigenous media was the preserve of the state. Iraq's press and broadcasters were controlled through the Ministry of Information, essentially allowing the Ba'ath party to dominate the media landscape. Laws enacted during that era broadly restricted expression and punished violations harshly. There was no regulation of the media independent of the government, and no legal protections for the profession. After the fall of the regime, the regulatory framework had to be built from scratch.

Furthermore, Bengio (1998 p. 7) argues that during the Ba'athist rule, the media in Iraq was used as a tool to control the flow of information, it also acted as a defective mirror by which the people could see a predetermined propagated reality. Additionally, the Ba'athist media's policies made the Iraqi people isolated as a society from the outside world, since they could not access information sources and they were not allowed to obtain satellite receiver devices to watch world satellite channels. Thus, they could only watch and listen to the few Ba'athist TV channels and radio stations; consequently, this had a psychological effect on Iraqis in general. Awad and Eaton (2013, p.8) describe these effects as:

The psychological impact of the Baathist regime's information control has also been pernicious. As Iraq became an international pariah through years of war and sanctions, Iraqis became increasingly cut off from the outside world, with little access to information from elsewhere. Children of the 1980s grew up on programmes like "From

the Battlefield”, where ubiquitous gruesome images from the Iraq-Iran war became entertaining playground conversation, setting a standard that remains with Iraqis today.

4.3 Iraq in transition

The fatal terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, on the United States of America (USA), affected the political scene of the world and led to the formulation of a new policy among the great powers toward extremist and terrorist groups and the so-called Axis of Evil¹⁵ countries. Only a month after these attacks, in October 2001, the western coalition powers launched a war against terrorism. They attacked Afghanistan, the country ruled by the extremist Taliban group and the stronghold of the Al-Qaeda group responsible for planning and implementing the attacks on the USA. These military attacks led to the abolition of the Taliban’s rule over Afghanistan and the weakening of the Al-Qaeda group. The western coalition’s campaign to end the terrorist threats did not stop with the invasion of Afghanistan or the destruction of the strongholds of the extremist and terrorist groups there. To illustrate, after completing the primary mission in Afghanistan, the USA and its allies turned their attention to Iraq, by March 2003 attacks had been launched against the Ba’athist regime in Baghdad in an attempt to end Ba’athist tyranny rule (Marr, 2012, p.259). There were many reasons given for the invasion of Iraq, the most prominent being the alleged possession of weapons of mass destruction, the Ba’athist regime’s links to the Al-Qaeda extremist group and its terrible record for abusing human rights (Marr, 2012; Astarjian, 2007, p.166; Campbell, 2006; The Guardian, 2005; Dumbrell, 2005, p.34; Stansfield, 2005).

After the invasion of Iraq, many other aspects of the social landscape changed, including politics, media and the economy. Following the invasion, the coalition forces established a provisional administration in Iraq, called the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA); a former US ambassador supervised the CPA for a period of 14 months. The main mission of this provisional authority was to reconstruct and transfer Iraq to be an effective democracy; in addition, fundamental reforms would occur in

15 - According to the United States of America’s policy, the Axis of Evil nations were countries that either sponsored extremist or terrorist groups in the world, or pursued weapons of mass destruction, such as biological and chemical weapons programmes. By 2002, the states of “Axis of Evil” were Iraq, Iran, Northern Korea, Cuba and Syria (BBC, 2002).

various aspects, including the media. The CPA intended to build a new media landscape that would be similar to and be influenced by the western style/system (Awad and Eaton, 2013, p.10). In the period that followed the transference of power from the CPA to the Iraqi interim government on 28 June 2004, the new government took the necessary procedures to conduct independent general elections; by 2005, for the first time in Iraq's history, free elections were held. The conduction of these elections signified momentous steps for the Iraqis in their attempt to building a democratic country. To illustrate, Marr (2012, p.287) states that in 2005 the political system in Iraq made the following important steps towards democracy:

During 2005, several events occurred that would define Iraq's political system: three elections (two for a national assembly and one a referendum on the constitution), the drafting of the constitution itself, and the process of forming indigenous national and provincial governments based on election results. These were the first genuinely free elections in Iraq's modern history, but they also solidified trends already under way, fragmentation of the state along ethnic and sectarian lines, a weak central government and a deeply divided political elite.

In the years that followed, Iraq witnessed other parliamentary and provincial elections which led to further changes in the political equation within this country through the emergence of new alliances, but these were still dominated by the sectarian forces observed (BBC, 2013a; Marr, 2012, p.287).

With regard to the media in Iraq, one of the early steps towards reforming this sector was the dissolution of the Ministry of Information in May 2003. This was replaced by an independent body aimed at supporting the media and regulating the infrastructures of this sector (Amos, 2010, p.24). For this purpose, in March 2004, the CPA issued Order Number 65, which announced the formation of the Iraqi Communications and Media Commission (Iraqi CMC), as well as many goals and objectives of this order (CPA, 2004, p.2) including the following:

- Foster plurality of and competition among Iraq's communications and media services, thereby promoting an informed and culturally diverse citizenship that derives maximum benefit in terms of choice, price and quality;
- Protect the interests of the citizens of Iraq as consumers of communications services;
- Encourage the evolution of electronic media and communications networks to the greater benefit of all who live in Iraq;

- Ensure that Iraqi telecommunications, broadcasts and information services are operated in a manner consistent with public safety;
- Promote and defend freedom of the media and assist the media community in Iraq to develop, strengthen and maintain professional working practices that support the media's role as a public watchdog; and,
- Establish an open and transparent regulatory organisation that reflects international best practices by attracting private sector investments, which will promote public confidence and accountability.

As a part of its efforts to achieve these media and communication goals, the CPA allocated an annual budget of six million US dollars to organise and manage the Iraqi communication sector, including the mass media outlets. The CMC had various responsibilities for regulating the licence of communications companies and media outlets in Iraq (except for the Kurdistan region); however, this independent commission struggled to achieve its responsibilities and aims. To illustrate, only weeks after the transfer of power from the CPA to the Iraqi interim government on 28 June 2004, Ayad Allawi the new prime minister disbanded the CMC as an independent commission when he appointed one of his security staff as the manager of the commission. However, when the government changed and Nouri Al-Maliki became the new prime minister in May 2006, the CMC was re-formed, but this time it had less authority (Amos, 2010, p.25). The new Iraqi CMC identifies that it provides licences for mass broadcasting outlets, such as television, satellite channels and radio stations in order to regulate the media strategy and guarantee the work of democracy, freedom of speech and a "committed expression and professional discourse". The official website of the CMC identified the following responsibilities and duties of the commission (CMC, 2011):

- Regulating broadcast and communications networks and services, including licensing, pricing, interconnection, as well as identifying basic conditions for the provision of public services.
- Planning, coordinating, distributing and identifying the use of broadcasting frequencies.
- Regulating media design and developing mechanisms for the press.
- Designing, developing and promoting the rules of electoral media.
- Supporting and promoting vocational rehabilitation, and adopting professional conduct guidance on media topics.
- Developing and disseminating communication and media policies along with proposing regulations on the government and the relevant bodies in this regard.

In fact, the overthrow of the Ba'athist regime in Iraq, by the US-led coalition, brought a much improved era for the media landscape in the country. In general, it changed from being a state-controlled propagating media to an open and freer media representing various views and agendas (Sumaida'ie, 2009). One of the main procedures aimed at improving the media focused on turning the assets of the old Ministry of Information into various public service media while also establishing a new Iraqi Media Network (IMN). The IMN includes some media outlets such as *Al-Iraqiya* satellite television, *Al-Sabah* (The Morning) daily newspaper, in addition to several terrestrial TV outlets and radio stations in the governorates (IMN, 2011; Price et al., 2007, p.25), these are official government channels. Furthermore, in the aftermath of the Ba'athist era, tens of terrestrial and satellite TV channels, newspapers and magazines, radio and online websites exist in different local and foreign languages, truly signifying a better press situation. According to El-Bettî (2007) and Gambill (2009), for the first time in its modern history, Iraq has witnessed a pluralistic free press without censorship or restrictions. Gambill (2009) claims that the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003 paved the way for the overflow of new and private media outlets, and just one year after the invasion hundreds of printed periodicals, tens of terrestrial and satellite TVs and radio stations were launched in various languages. Additionally, Price et al. (2007, p.19) acknowledge that the Iraqi media, since 2003, is now free to discuss and criticise the fate of the country, to illustrate:

In the aftermath of the 2003 Iraq War, the restrictions placed by the Ba'ath on public discourse literally disappeared overnight and a plethora of newspapers, radio stations and television networks emerged from the bonds of Saddam's Iraq, [all of which are now] free to debate and criticise the fate of their nation.

At the same time, as Hlidkova (2011) and Sumaida'ie (2009) point out, after April 2003 hundreds of periodicals and broadcasting outlets sprang up or emerged to introduce to the new Iraq different political parties, sectarian groups and other private sector bodies, broadcasting in different languages. The most prominent newspapers that appeared in this period in Iraq were: *El-ittîhâd* (The Union), *El-Teaxî* (The Brotherhood), *Al-Besayr* (Insights), *Al-Sa'e* (The Hour), *Dar Es Salaam* (The Peace House), *Al-îttîsam* (The Sit-In), *Al-Mînber* (The Tribune), *Al-Rafîdeyin* (The Two Rivers), *Al-Edale* (The Justice), *Bedr*, *Al-De'we* (The Call), *Azzaman* (The Time), *Al-Meşrîq* (The Orient), *Al-Beyine* (The Evidence), *Al-îraq* (Iraq), *Bexdad* (Baghdad), *Al-Muitemer* (The

Conference), *Terîq Elşe'b* (The Road of the People), *Al-Mwatîn* (The Citizen), *Al-Menar* (The Light Stand), *El'ehd* (The Era), *Al-Destur* (The Constitution), and many others. In addition, there are now more than 30 Iraqi satellite TV stations broadcasting, such as: *Al-Sharqiya* (Eastern), *Al-Hürriya* (The Freedom), *Al-Baghdadia*, *Al-Fayha TV*, *Alforat* (The Euphrates), *Al-Sumaria* (The Sumerian), *Al-Fîrqa*, *Al-ghadeer*, *Bîladî* (My Country), *Al-Babiliye* (The Babylonian), *Al-Rasheed*, *Selahîdîn*, *Al-Mosuliyah*, *Al-Diyar*, *Al-Enbar*, *Al-gharbiya*, *Al-Selam* (Peace), and many others (Reuters, 2013). In terms of radio stations, by 2013 almost 60 radio stations existed, for example: *Dicle* (Tigris), *the Iraq of Love*, *Summer*, *Newa*, and many others. In addition, a considerable number of online news sites and websites were also established. If the political parties and the sectarian bodies dominate the print and broadcast media in Iraq due to their financial potentials, the situation may differ for online media. There are many private sector websites participating in journalistic work in the media scene in the new Iraq, since this new media tool is a low-cost media outlet and exceeds some obstacles of media work.

It is also valuable to note that, in 2005, the permanent constitution of Iraq approved and guaranteed, in a referendum, the basic human rights of Iraqis. This constitution defined the Republic of Iraq as a “single federal, independent and fully sovereign state in which the system of government is republican, representative, parliamentary and democratic”. Consequently, the Republic of Iraq guarantees the freedom of expression and the press, individual privacy, freedom to form political parties, freedom of communication and correspondence, as well as many other freedom elements. For example, in article 38, the constitution ensures the freedom of expression, freedom of press, printing, advertisement, media and publication, as long as this does not lead to any violation of public order or morality (Iraqi Council of Representatives, 2008).

In addition to the constitution, some government bodies and political systems in Iraq have guaranteed freedom of expression and a free press, yet media work is still risky in Iraq. The threats on this sector come from various sources, including government officials, sectarian groups and other outlaw bands which take advantage of the general deterioration of security and the sectarian violence that still prevails in Iraq to the present day (Reuters, 2013; Marr, 2012, p.374). Marr (2012, p.374) further states that press freedom in Iraq “came with a price” since journalists, writers and TV programme presenters are still at risk of being abused or even assassinated because of their criticisms and opinions. To illustrate, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)

demonstrated that, from the date of the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 to 2011, at least 150 local and foreign journalists and media workers have been killed either through targeted killings or in other circumstances (CPJ, 2013). Additionally, journalists have been kidnapped and newspaper and other media outlet offices have been attacked because of the publishing of critical articles or reports. A good example of this can be considered from 2 April 2013 when the head offices of four independent newspapers in Baghdad: El-Destur (The Constitution), El-Barlaman (The Parliament), El-Mustaqbal (The Future) and El-Nas (The People), were attacked and burned by militants wounding several employees. It is believed that these actions were motivated by the publishing of articles criticising a Shi'ite Muslim cleric (AFP, 2013; Reuters, 2013). Furthermore, in 2012, five Iraqi journalists were murdered in targeted killings (IFJ, 2012). More recently, news reports identified that on 15 December 2013 a female TV presenter, Nawras Al-Nuaimi who worked for Al-Mosuliyah TV, was murdered by gunmen near her house in Mosul city – this raised the number of journalists killed in the three last months of 2013 in Iraq to six (Albawaba News, 2013).

In the meantime, chaos in the media scene in Iraq can be clearly noticed, this is deemed to be a reflection of the political, sectarian and ethnic chaos. Most of the mass media outlets have a narrow policy by concentrating on specific subjects. For example, according to Gambill (2009, p. 1), the chief media channels in Iraq focus on single ethnic and sectarian interests, to illustrate:

Most major Iraqi media outlets are oriented toward the outlook and interests of a single ethno-sectarian community and sponsored by partisan political or religious forces. They typically avoid overtly sectarian language, adopting more subtle cues for differentiation (e.g., terms used to describe combatants). Direct calls for violence are rare in aboveground media outlets, but indirect incitement of sectarian animosity is common (e.g., coverage of tit-for-tat sectarian violence that dwells incessantly on the "tats").

Despite the security situations that impede journalists' work, there are other problems hindering media work in Iraq, such as a lack of professionalism and readability, which disrupts the effectiveness of the media. According to El-Se'd (2011), the majority of media outlets in Iraq are owned by political, ethnic or religious bodies, thus they frequently have specific and tight policies for dealing with certain events and/or issues. In addition, although the number of media workers and journalists has increased dramatically since 2003, there is still a lack of journalistic skills that poses a further

serious problem. Consequently, it is important to consider the different constraints which are affecting the media in Iraq in order to determine whether the media is effective in contributing to the overall human development process in Iraq (El-Se'd, 2011).

4.4 Political system of the Kurdistan region

The Kurdistan region is located in the north of Iraq – it is a part of the federal state. This autonomous region emerged when the Ba'athist regime withdrew its army and governmental administrative organs from the three Kurdish governorates in the aftermath of the popular uprising of the Kurdish people in 1991 (Stansfield, 2003, p.121; Cheterian, 2013). Hence, the Kurdish political parties represented in the Kurdistan Front ¹⁶ developed to overcome the political and administrative vacuum that occurred because of the withdrawal, as a result new legislative and executive organs and institutions emerged in the region. Accordingly, the Kurdistan Front established a committee responsible for making the necessary procedures to hold elections. To illustrate this further, on 19 May 1992 the first free election was held in the three Kurdish governorates whereby a parliament was established, which resulted in the formation of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in July of the same year (Kurdistan Parliament, 2013; Romano, 2006, p.208-209; Stansfield, 2003, p.121). Although the KRG formally governs the three provinces of Erbil, the political capital city of the Kurdistan region of Iraq, Sulaymaniyah, the cultural capital, and Dhok, it has power over the other Kurdish cities located outside its administration. For example, to an extent, it has power in Kirkuk, Mexmur, Xaneqîn and elsewhere as these are considered “disputed areas” between the KRG and the federal government in Baghdad. Besides, the Kurdistan region's draft constitution describes and determines the Kurdish territory in Iraq as follows:

The Iraqi Kurdistan Region is a geographical historical entity consisting of Dhok governorate with its existing administrative borders, Kirkuk, Sulaymaniyh, Erbil, and districts of Aqrah, Shaikhan, Sinjar, Talkaif, Qaraqush, and township of Zamar, Ba'asheeqa, and Aski Kalak from Nineveh province, districts of Khanaqeen and Mandali from Diyala province with its administrative border before 1968 (Kurdistan Parliament, 2009, p.2).

¹⁶ -Kurdistan Front made up of the KDP, PUK and three smaller parties founded in 1987 (see McDowall, 2005, p.23).

Furthermore, according to the Kurdistan region's constitution draft, approved by the Kurdish parliament on 24 June 2009 and awaiting a referendum for it to be in effect, the political system in the region is a democratic republic and parliamentary, as such:

The Iraqi Kurdistan Region is a region within the Federal State of Iraq. It is a democratic republic with a parliamentary political system that is based on political pluralism, the principle of separation of powers, and the peaceful transfer of power through direct, general and periodic elections that use a secret ballot (Kurdistan Parliament, 2009, p.2).

In the last two decades, since the emergence of the Kurdish autonomous region in 1991, four parliamentary elections have been held. The first election, held in May 1992, resulted in the PUK and the KDP equally winning the vast majority of seats. These two parties then formed a coalition government in July 1992 when they began ruling the region; however, civil war broke out between these two ruling parties in 1994, this disrupted the executive, legislative and all other administrative organs in the region. The civil war, which ended in 1997, painfully affected the new self-governing Kurdish region by causing major setbacks to all aspects of life (Rubin, 2008; Cockburn, 1996).

According to the International Crisis Group (2010), the Kurdish regional government, from its foundation in 1992 until 2005, was a semi-authoritarian system, which permitted only a certain amount of freedom of speech. Only with the Iraqi Kurdistan legislative elections of 2005 for parliament, which were held to coincide with the second parliamentary election of Iraq (held in 2005) and in the aftermath of the removal of the Ba'athist regime, did the situation improve allowing more freedom of speech. This election, which coincided with the parliamentary and provincial elections in Iraq on 30 January 2005, resulted in the Alliance of Kurdistan, consisting of the PUK and the KDP, with 104 seats of the 111 seats in parliament.

The most important election, however, was the parliamentary election that was held on 25 July 2009 in the Kurdistan region, whereby for the first time real and strong opposition parties competed with the classic ruling parties in the region. As a result, new opposition powers in the Kurdistan region emerged, including the Change Movement (CM), which won 25 seats in parliament. This led to the emergence of new voices in the Kurdish parliament, calling for more reforms and transparency. Additionally, new opposition media outlets were established which began to criticise the two dominant parties (the PUK and the KDP) for their shortcomings by revealing

corruption and calling for more democracy and transparency. This election in July 2009 can, to some extent, be considered as the starting point of a better democracy in the Kurdistan region (International Crisis Group, 2010).

Furthermore, the fourth parliamentary elections were held on 21 September 2013. This time the elections resulted in the retreat of the PUK as one of the two main and classic ruling parties as they fell to third place with only 18 seats (loosing 11 seats). In contrast, the CM won 24 seats and became second to the KDP, which remained in first place with 38 parliamentary seats. Three Islamic parties also made their way into parliament by obtaining 17 seats, including the Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU) – 10 seats, the Kurdistan Islamic Group (KIG) – six seats, and the Kurdistan Islamic Movement (KIM) – one seat (BBC, 2013b).

The diverse political structure of the Kurdish parliament reflects the increasing desire of the Kurdish people for reform in their fight against corruption; thus, reflecting that the power balance is now changing.

4.5 Human rights and freedom of speech in the Kurdistan region

Various laws protect the rights of minority groups within the region; to illustrate, there are quotas for each ethnic minority in parliament and the minorities have private schools available in their languages. Furthermore, in total, there are 111 seats in parliament, 100 of which are general seats and 11 are allocated to minorities, as such: five seats for the Christians including the Chaldeans and Assyrians; five seats for the Turkmens; and, one seat for the Armenian component (IHEC, 2009). Moreover, there is a quota to protect women's rights, which guarantees their contribution to political life. The regulation no. 10, from 2009, issued by the Independent High Electoral Commission of Iraq (IHEC) ensures that at least 30% of the total seats of the Kurdistan parliament are allocated to women (IHEC, 2009). In addition, further alterations were made in 2009 to the framework of the Kurdistan parliamentary elections with regards to reducing the age of parliamentary candidates from 30 to 25 years, to ensure better opportunities for youths to participate in political life.

With regard to human rights, the Kurdistan region has witnessed significant developments; it is considered significantly better than the rest of Iraq and its neighbouring countries in this aspect. To illustrate, Amnesty International (2009) reports that since the removal of the Ba'athist regime in Baghdad, Iraqi Kurdistan has

become prosperous in improving human rights and many non-government organisations (NGO)s have been established to improve human rights and civil society. Additionally, progress has occurred in the field of freedom of speech through the issuance of a modern press law in 2008. Consequently, many workshops by civil society organisations, journalists and government bodies have created a common understanding and strengthened the cooperation between civil society bodies and government organs. Amnesty International (2009) further reports about the gains that the Kurdistan region has made in terms of human rights; to illustrate, they argue that in 2008 the region's authorities released numerous political prisoners from jail, all of which were held without trial or any charges.

The protection for women from old-fashioned traditions, such as early and forced marriage, honour killings, female circumcisions, tribally motivated violence, domestic and sexual violence and illiteracy are all considered important aspects of the KRG's policies. Adjustments to the Personal Status Law were made in 2008 to enhance women's rights. Furthermore, the KRG established specialised police organisations in cities and towns for the reporting of violence against women and to protect them from any possible violence. Many civil society organisations specialise in protecting women's rights, some of which are government funded to develop women's awareness about women's rights and about the protection of threats to women. Of equal importance, in recent years, efforts have been made by government specialist directories and NGOs through mass media outlets, platforms and workshops to educate all classes of Kurdish society about women's rights, this has – to an extent – resulted in reducing violence toward women. In general, women have reinforced their decision-making positions by proving their presence across every vital forum of life in the region. For example, women make up almost 35 of the total members of parliament; this is high when compared to neighbouring countries' parliaments. Moreover, there are women ministers in the KRG cabinet and other pivotal administrative and political positions. In addition, many of women with leadership positions in Kurdish political parties are linked to other organisations that work to protect women's rights. This is in addition, to the strong presence of women in other aspects, such as in the arts, academia and other sectors in society (Hamasaheed, 2011; Alternatives, 2010; Mohammed, 2009).

Despite the Kurds in the Kurdistan region of Iraq taking important steps to improve human rights, their gains are still vulnerable to violation. Local and international

organisations report about the continuing violence against human rights and women's rights in the Kurdistan region. For example, traditions still allow teenage girls to face circumcision (female genital mutilation) in some rural areas (HRW, 2010). Furthermore, studies conducted by the Association for Crisis Assistance and Solidarity Development Cooperation (WADI) show that high proportions of Kurdish women are still being circumcised in the Kurdistan region, especially in the Kirkuk and Dhok provinces, and in the Germiyan area (WADI, 2013). WADI believes that female genital mutilation is predominantly widespread among Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims as well as in other components of Iraq, except in Christian and Êzidî (Yazidis) populations in the Kurdistan region. However, efforts by many NGOs have resulted in the establishment of Kurdish women's organisations and health bodies in the region; furthermore, in 2011, the Kurdistan regional parliament approved a regulation banning domestic violence including female genital mutilation (HRW, 2012). This regulation, which is considered unique in Iraq's history, includes the prevention of other forms of violence against women's rights, including: forced marriages, child marriages, marriages for blood, abortion against the mother's will and other elements. Although the law identifies serious penalties and procedures against circumcision crimes and other forms of violence against women, it is not possible to stop these crimes and violence completely. Women in Iraqi Kurdistan occasionally burn and kill themselves because of psychological pressures; in addition, they might be killed or physically tortured because of religious or tribal motives and beliefs. To illustrate, a survey conducted by One Voice Group reports that between 2001 and 2012, 74 women died either by murdering or burning themselves and there were 279 cases of sexual violence (Awene, 2013a).

Concerning the media sector, there have been improvements with regard to violence against the press and free speech, though journalists still face harassment and constraints to their work. The new Presswork regulation No. 35, in the Kurdistan region, imposes only fines and does not contain any clause for detaining journalists for media irregularities; however, instead judges can selectively impose punishments that are based on the old Iraqi laws that impose imprisonment for journalists (UNAMI, 2012). According to the Metro Centre for Protecting Journalists, in 2011 there were 359 reported acts of violence against journalists in Iraqi Kurdistan, including: threats, detaining, beating, targeting and injuring with guns, burning and destroying media

offices, preventing journalists from conducting their work, etc (Hawlati, 2012). (These notions will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter).

Laws in the region allow demonstrations, another form of protesting and expressing opinions, about different events, phenomenon and the authorities' shortcomings and defects. The law for regulating demonstrations was approved by the Kurdistan parliament to ensure that people had a right to demonstrate. However, many cases of violation and riots have been reported in the last few years; to illustrate, demonstrations in 2011 continued sporadically from 17 February to 19 April in Sulaymaniyah, this led to riots and clashes between the Kurdish riot police and protesters. These conflicts resulted in the death of at least seven people and more than 900 people were wounded (UNAMI, 2012; BBC, 2011b; CNN, 2011). The main protester demands (which included more than a thousand people) were concerned with the KRG's resignation over reforms and justice; the protesters were chanting against the ruling parties and the KRG's defects. During this time, the media were also unsafe; to illustrate, at least two satellite TV offices were attacked and burned down for reasons relating to reporting about the demonstrations. According to UNAMI (2012), on 22 February 2011, the head office of the Naliya TV (NRT) from the private sector in Sulaymaniyah city was burned down by unknown militants and in Erbil the office of KNN TV, which belongs to the Gorran movement CM that was an opposition party at that time, was burned down on 17 February 2011. Many other violations against various media outlet offices and journalists were reported during these demonstrations.

4.6 Conclusion

The new Iraqi political system encourages freedom of speech, allowing the media to work more freely in terms of the legislation and the constitutional context. The country has witnessed a media boom with the emergence of new mass media outlets; however, media work is still risky and can be dangerous and even life threatening. As detailed in this chapter, the threats to journalists come from various sources, including: interest groups, religious and tribal groups, political parties, extremist gangs and even from government seniors. All of these groups have taken advantage of the general political and security deteriorations in order to target journalists; moreover, these offenders nearly always go unpunished (Albawaba, 2013). The Iraqi government

is dominated by sectarian beliefs and is therefore restricted in reducing the threats to journalists – it is not deemed appropriate to protect journalists. On the other hand, in the Kurdistan region, many reforms and modifications have been made to laws and some new laws have been issued, fuelled by the government and NGOs. Nonetheless, the dominant culture of societal violence still poses a serious impediment to human rights; in particular, concerning the freedom of speech and women's rights whereby women and journalists are still subjected to violence and even death. This chapter contributed to a greater understanding of media situations in both Iraq and the Kurdistan region, regulations relating to media work and human rights, through examining various aspects of the socio-political landscape and attempts made towards building democratic institutions in the country.

Chapter 5: Media and emerging democracies

5.1 Introduction

In order to understand how media function in new democratic countries and to identify the most common barriers to media work in such countries, including the Kurdistan region, in this chapter essential information has been provided and a comparison has been made between new democratic countries. This is necessary in order to fully understand the most common barriers to the media in the Kurdistan region and to recognize common features, differences and similarities with that of other new democracies.

In this chapter, knowledge gained from the in-depth interviews was used to identify and explore the most common barriers to media work in the Kurdistan region. The researcher resorted to this form of primary data because those interviewed for this study were the most relevant persons to this subject and were fully aware of the media situation in Kurdistan. The participants, experienced journalists, work for various online news sites and other traditional media channels, and media academics and trainers who also have years of experience in journalism. This is important because such well-informed respondents can offer accurate and deep understanding about the affairs or events of the study and can also “provide shortcuts to the prior history of such situations”, which may help the investigator to discover further pertinent sources of evidence (Yin, 2009, p. 108). Therefore, their perspectives constitute useful sources to examine this topic and discuss the current situation of media in the Kurdistan region; in particular, discussions with those who have such extensive experience is a good way to investigate and identify the most common and prominent impediments to media in this region. This will finally provide a full understanding of the current circumstances relating to the media in the Kurdistan region.

The Kurdish people, like other societies in transition from authoritarian regimes to democratic systems, suffer from various issues that impede the freedom of media work and the development of society. The Kurdish region inherited deep legacies from the previous Ba’athist dictatorship and totalitarian regime rule in Iraq, which lasted for almost 35 years and is still negatively influencing the societal, political, economic as

well as other aspects in the region. For the media, which is an important dynamic part of society, the problems are still prominent. Several statements and reports acknowledge the difficulties and threats that obstruct the way in which the media work; thus, freedom is identified as a continuing problem by numerous international and local organisations, including: Reporters without Border, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, International Federation of Journalists, Kurdistan Journalists Syndicate, and others. In this chapter, a wide range of quantitative data from these different reports and statements are provided in order to investigate the situation of media work and its barriers in the Kurdistan region. This is also important because these international and local organizations are closely monitoring the threats and impediments to journalists and media in the Kurdish emerging democracy. Their data also constitute useful sources for investigating the circumstances of the media in this region.

This chapter aims to explore the many problems affecting new democratic societies. It will also discuss the important role of the media in democracy and how this is more difficult in countries that are in transition to democracy, especially for societies with a communist past. In the transition period, the remnants of the former regime in different government departments, in addition to the many social, political and economic blocks and companies that have had interests with the former regime, play a role in the new era and may impede the process of transition towards democracy. This is reflected in many sectors including the media. In order to provide more understanding and a comparison with the Kurdish situation, the features and problems affecting the media in Russia and Ukraine will be examined. This chapter also aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the different aspects affecting the current media situation in the Kurdistan region, specifically with regards to the prominent controversial problems and impediments concerned with the journalists and local and international human rights, and media organisations.

5.2 Media in new democracies

The principal duty of the mass media is to facilitate communication among people in society in order to generate public opinion – this is a pivotal precondition for democracy. Consequently, the media is utilised as a tool to publish information and opinions and is therefore important in fostering democracy (Weber and Grosz, 2009).

Furthermore, as De Smaele (2006, p.37) argues, media is a pillar of democracy and fundamental for electoral democracy since it helps voters to participate in the elections freely and consciously by informing voters of pertinent information. This process allows people to make conscious decisions about their choices; however, in order to achieve a true democracy, it is necessary for the media to be separated from government and political organisations and bodies in order for them to be truly and economically independent. Moreover, the media provides a decisive base for public education as it provides legitimacy to democratic governments. Concurrently, political leaders can strengthen their legitimacy by interacting with different mass media outlets; accordingly, the media helps to document the political situation, as Alfaro Moreno (2006, p.303) states:

It is important to recognise that today the media constitutes a crucial source of civic education and legitimisation of democratic power. Political elites legitimise themselves or join dissident discourses through their interactions with newspapers, magazines, radio and television. Notions of political authority, political values and general understanding of a nation's political institutions are consolidated through the daily programmes of the mass media and particularly via news. The national and international agenda emerge from daily mass media processes of production and consumption. Both the concept and feeling of nation and of the world are also articulated in the production and consumption of media.

In new democratic countries, the role of the media is very important to the transition process because it addresses all democratic institutions that are established and since the transition from authoritarian regimes to democracy is a comprehensive process it involves all aspects of society life. As Katrin Voltmer argues, this process is like a social experiment whereby the entire situation in society is influenced:

Transitions to democracy are social experiments that affect virtually all aspects of a society. They therefore provide a unique opportunity for deepening both theoretical and empirical understanding of the functioning of democratic institutions in different cultural and political contexts (Voltmer, 2006, p.1).

Overall, Voltmer (2008) determines three pathways in the transition to democracy. First is the transition from the communist regime to democracy, in general this includes republics from the former Soviet Union and some eastern and central European countries that were part of the Soviet Union as they were dominated by the communist systems. The second transformation to democracy comes from military

dictatorships that derive their legitimacy from the so-called communist's attempts to control power. This includes countries from South America, and Spain and Portugal in Europe. The third and final pathway of transformation is transforming from a one-party dictatorship to a democratic country, which according to Voltmer (2008) is very difficult as these autocratic regimes have their own justification for maintaining their power. Such regimes focus on the alleged eradication of poverty and other efforts focusing on development and building a settled society. Examples of which include Taiwan and Southern Korea in East Asia as well as many countries in Africa. Similarly, the transition to democracy in Iraq, which came through the use of force by external powers, can in accordance with Voltmer be categorised as follows. According to the political situation in Iraq (prior to the invasion in 2003), there was a mix of all of these pathways, in other words Iraq was ruled by one socialist party that utilised a military dictatorship. The Arab Ba'athist Socialist Party was the only ruling party of the country since 1968; furthermore, a bloody military coup allowed them to initially seize and then maintain their power. Consequently, one socialist party and military dictatorship ruled Iraq. Saddam Hussein's socialist and military dictatorship ruled Iraq for decades; many justifications were given to how he maintained control over the country and how he suppressed his opponents. The most prominent excuses focused on maintaining the territorial integrity of Iraq, in terms of the external threats specifically from Iran and Israel, as well as focus on developing and educating the country, etc. Moreover, Saddam Hussein was the head of the state in which he ruled for nearly 24 years, he was the commander in chief of all of the armed forces, and each minister or senior official from within the government had a high military rank.

Without doubt, fundamental political change in any country is problematic as it affects all aspects of society and is likely to be a lengthy transition so as to adequately manage and stabilise the situation and institutions. Frequently, when a country transforms from a totalitarian or military dictatorship regime to a democratic system, it will undergo a period of instability in terms of politics, social, culture, economics and media. Mostly, such transformation begins when an emerging tenuous democracy occurs in these countries whereby there is a shift from one political system to another. According to Voltmer (2008, p.26) this instability phase of transformation frequently has dramatic outcomes for both the country's economy and the media, since the process of under-progress is considered to be another impediment which may prevent

the media from improving its total potential (Andreev, 2003). Furthermore, Voltmer describes the conflicts in most new democracies, especially in Eastern Europe, as:

Political parties are not the central organising force in political life, as they lack the organisational strength and clear ideological profile of their Western European counterparts. Instead, other division and group interests shape the political context, for example, ethnicity, religions, regional affinities, clientilism or simply individual charismatic leaders. In some instances, the conflict between support of the old and the new regime has become a new conflict line in its own right (Voltmer, 2008, p.27).

Nonetheless, the existence of a free media in new democracies is always a controversial and mysterious subject. The freedom of the mass media is strongly linked to democracy as it usually moves in parallel with the democratic development. Additionally, the mass media should be given more freedom and special attention by the political powers as this will help to foster democracy. To illustrate, Boler (2008, p.37) notes:

Freedom of the press requires carefully crafted and thoroughly debated public policies that provide the foundation for a pluralistic and well-funded free press. Without such policies, democracy would be impossible.

Democracy and the media's freedom are in constant interaction; thus, the extent of media freedom is always considered to be one of the most prominent criteria for the existence of democracy in any country. In such situations of transformation, the media sector like other political, economic and civil society aspects, attempts to operate separately from the political parties and elite powers in order to truly have its own role and words in society – despite many obstacles impeding the efforts in this trend. In new democracies, media regulation and a supportive atmosphere for free speech may still be developing depending on the political situation, economic conditions, social status and other aspects of societal life, which may be fragile (LaMay, 2001, p.3).

Consequently, the problems that impede media development in new democracies are many. One of the main obstacles to the media is the negative use of the governing of the media; to illustrate, according to Voltmer (2008, p.26), all of the authoritarian systems use the media as a tool to serve their own goals and to promote their political system. Therefore, when transformation occurs the media is likely to attempt to run freely, but this can lead to confrontation between the new power elite and the mass media outlets. Furthermore, in emerging democratic societies the government

frequently attempts to censor the media in their own favour through forms of: lawsuits, such as defamation and civil or libel cases; threats to national security, which may be blasphemous; and, through other restrictions on journalistic work such as licensing which may impede access to state information for journalists (LaMay, 2001, p.3). The judiciary system provides another barrier to the media because it is not usually functioning properly in new democracies, previously it was controlled by the dominant party/government as a means to implement their orders and instructions. Concurrently, journalists may be unsafe to conduct their work freely as the authorities, intentionally or unintentionally, may be unable to provide secure protection for them meaning they face serious threats (LaMay, 2001, p.4).

Likewise, financial support constitutes another notable problem of freedom of the media, since efficient and independent media outlets need independent sources of funding. In such transforming societies, the authorities and political parties often use their influence to restrict financial support to particular media outlets by suspending subsidies or preventing advertisements or other economic means that will affect their credibility (LaMay, 2001, p.4). Consequently, it is difficult to construct and develop non-state or non-partisan media outlets. LaMay determines other obstacles that face journalism and media in new democracies, including:

Other common problems that confront good journalism in emerging democracies include “envelope journalism”, or bribery, and self-censorship in the name of national or cultural values. Governments sometimes use their power to purchase or withhold subsidies, usually in the form of advertising, in order to influence reporting. Legal, cultural or institutional buffers between journalism and government suppression are thin and few, and one of the most important institutional buffers, the judiciary, is often an instrument of the ruling party. Finally, threats to journalists’ safety make independent reporting a very risky enterprise in many places (LaMay, 2001, p.3).

It is valuable also to note that the governments of countries in transition, despite economic pressures, resort to other justifications to silence media criticism. To illustrate, in most new democracies, the media works to serve public interests, such as national unity, political stability and economic improvement. The state in such democracies often uses these claims as an instrument to control the media in their country (Veltmer, 2008, p.26-27). Moreover, the mass media in new democracies is also concerned with media deregulation and globalisation. LaMay (2001, p.16) believes that in new democracies, the state’s control of the media is exchanged with another

monopoly in the private sector responsible for deregulation; however, this may still be linked to some senior officials from the government. As a result, many interests actually influence the messages of such media outlets. Conversely, globalisation, which has enabled foreign investment in different aspects of developing democracies, organisations and groups, has led to the adoption of a specific policy in favour of their goals since these foreign investors and their financiers have their own plans and agendas that they are working to. Furthermore, LaMay (2001, p.3) describes media and journalism in new democracies in terms of the following identified obstacles:

In many emerging democracies, media law and a culture supportive of free expression are works in progress, dependent on enabling political, social, and economic conditions that, if they exist, are fragile. Throughout the developing world, for instance, government restrictions on the press commonly come in the form of litigation for offenses such as criminal, blasphemous, and civil libel, and violations of national security or emergency regulations. Generally, licensing requirements for journalists and severe restrictions on access to government information still characterise many developing societies.

Within these new democratic countries, the influential state supported media outlets cannot progress their general services; however, the private sector mass media outlets are also incapable of building their own investment or even paying salaries to their staff as they are faced with excessive charges and taxes. Thus, they are unable to develop or finance their endeavours; this has led to a lack of skills and professionalism in the journalistic sector. Meanwhile, many other difficulties face the real journalists in these new democracies, including self-censorship for the justification of national issues and society values and traditions, despite bribery of journalists by the influential elites who gain their loyalty (LaMay, 2001, p.4). Consequently, there are other problems which relate to the media's duty as a watchdog of the political elite and the government's performance. Undoubtedly, one of the most prominent bases of democratisation is establishing techniques to make the political figures accountable to the public. This is usually achieved when the mass media performs one of its key tasks as a watchdog of the government and political affairs; however, in newly democratised countries the media is often unable to perform this duty effectively (Votmer, 2006, p.4). The new governments in newly democratised countries are usually fragile and incapable of assembling the necessary procedures for some of the public issues that are raised by the mass media. To illustrate, it is important to challenge the new ruling

regime in order to truly liberate society; although, this situation is complex because the legitimacy of the new ruling system in a newly democratised country is already fragile and the government's power may still be limited (Vltmer, 2006, p.4). Thus, it is important not to expect too much from the new systems, particularly in terms of general security or economic issues. Conversely, it is worth noting that in new democracies the mass media outlets generally rely on the government for continued financial support, but this could affect their efficiency and independence as they are unlikely to be able to criticise the authorities or political parties (Vltmer, 2006, p.4).

Equally, the success of the transition from a non-democratic regime to a democratic system is dependent, to a high extent, on the fundamental changes of the "role orientations and rules of interaction within the political communication system", despite the fact that in some instances the players engaging in the transition process might be from past regimes (Vltmer 2006, p.6). Meanwhile, the nature and the route of the previous ruling system, despite any previous political propaganda toward the new democratic establishment, may still play a role in reconstructing the balance of influence between the mass media and the new authorities. Furthermore, restricted critical debates are often a feature of mass media in new democratic societies as the content and quality of the messages created by the mass media or the politicians are affected by their (possibly biased) understanding of the political situation or their role in the democratic process; to illustrate, Vltmer (2006, p.6) states:

The quality of mediated politics depends on both politicians and journalists, and the way in which they address the citizens. Any lack of diversity in the "marketplace of ideas", low quality of information or absence of critical discussion are not, therefore, an isolated problem of the media, but a result of the specific constraints evolving from the media's relationships with politicians and the audience. Similarly, the way in which politicians package their messages to voters is as much a response to the demands and needs of the citizens as a function of the routines of the media. And, finally, citizens' understanding of political matters and the way in which they fulfill their own role as the ultimate sovereign of the democratic process is to a large extent a response to the content, form and quality of the messages they receive from politicians and the mass media. This is not to say that journalists, politicians and citizens do not bear any responsibility for their own actions. But, understanding the interdependencies between these actors helps to explain why, in some cases, the media are more.

In terms of participatory journalism, in the new democracies, this trend of journalism is desirable to an extent as it aims to support civil society, especially in developing

countries where democratisation is a process reliant on more than one organisation. Participatory journalism in emerging societies is widespread as it reaches a high proportion of people, including those outside the cities in rural areas, who are usually out of reach of mass mediums, except government radio. In such societies, participatory journalism may not function well because most of these societies will never have observed an influential or independent media. Furthermore, progress is hindered by many serious problems concerning poverty, high rates of illiteracy and significantly dispersed people. The Internet, despite being the best tool for facilitating interactivity and participatory journalism, is still unavailable to the majority because of poverty or a lack of technological potential, thus benefits to society are not observed (LaMay, 2001, p.19).

Another feature of new democratic countries, according to LaMay (2001, p.12) concerns the increasing number of people who call themselves journalists. Many of whom are untrained and unqualified; the Internet exacerbates this trend further in new and even in established democracies whereby anyone can claim that they are a journalist. In terms of elections, the majority of people in new democracies, especially those who have not previously participated in the political situation or have not been a part of the previous government or the opposition, participate in the elections and vote not based on their own steady view. Therefore, the role of mass media outlets is pivotal and essential for supporting the existing tendencies as well as for affecting the public's political stances and their future attitudes especially during elections (Kostadinova 2014, p. 2; Voltmer, 2006, p.13).

Despite the barriers affecting the mass media in newly democratised countries, other media experts believe that the development of the media does not depend on their legitimacy or financial aspects only. For example, Nordenstreng (2001) argues that criticising the media and their messages should be an important part of culture whereby academics, specialists and the public help to improve the media. Moreover, Nordenstreng (2001, p.63) believes that responsibility and accountability are vital for the mass media:

- (1) Media are powerful, ever more powerful agents in society.
- (2) Media are free, exceptionally free due to First Amendment and similar constitutional guarantees; in terms of the constitutional status, you are more free to run a paper than to run a barber shop. But, next to that freedom comes
- (3) responsibility and accountability, which is also part

of the constitutional framework. And, (4) the powerful media that are free from accountability need monitoring and criticism.

On the other hand, Herman and Chomsky (1994) claim that since the media companies have some links with the official bodies they depend on the government for some purposes such as getting formal licenses, especially for the TV and Radio companies and for more general policy support; therefore, to some extent they are probably subject to government control and restrictions. To illustrate:

Another structural relationship of importance is the media companies' dependence on and ties with government. The Radio-TV companies and networks all require government licenses and franchises and are thus potentially subject to government control and harassment. This technical legal dependency has been used as a club to discipline the media, and media policies that stray too often from an establishment orientation could activate this threat (Herman and Chomsky, 1994, p. 13)

5.3 Media in post-communist countries

The political transition and restructuring of media systems has occurred in various countries across the world, some of which were stimulated by the downfall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991 (Marin and Lengel, 2007, p.51; LaMay, 2001). These events were significant turning points for the political future of many countries in Eastern Europe and Asia. The end of the various dictatorships and communist regimes brought substantial and fundamental changes in their respective countries. To illustrate, countries that were part of the Soviet Bloc were affected across all sectors in society, particularly the political, economic and social aspects, and the mass media being utilised as an important and dynamic tool for reconstructing the new society (Marin and Lengel, 2007, p.51). In fact, the transition from communism to a democratic regime was weak as the transformation process needed to reconstruct not only the political body but also the entire economic sector. Equally, this problematic situation can also be applied to the mass media, as an important part of the political and economic situation, which faces many obstacles in newly democratic countries with communist pasts (Veltmer, 2008, p.30). In terms of reforming the mass media, a transformation phase also needs to occur. In general, for the new democracies in Eastern Europe with communist pasts, the governments reformed their media regulations by approved legislation that favoured the freedom of the press

(Krasnoboka and Kees, 2004). In contrast, Marin and Lengel (2007, p.51) acknowledge the fact that the influence of the mass media in transforming societies is complex because democratisation and the freedom of the speech are just being acknowledged. Therefore, in Eastern and Central Europe, media transformation remains complicated as many threats are presented by past and present political systems and inherited culture, which affect the implementation of the new government's policies.

In order to understand the media in the post-communist era, it is useful to briefly explain the conditions experienced by the mass media and journalists in the Soviet Union era. During communist rule, mass media functioned under strict control by either government organisations or the communist party itself. Voltmer (2008, p.29) describes the mass media situation during communist ruling as being controlled by the government which further directed the economy and their "ideological legitimisation" which framed the performance and functionality of the media. Consequently, their leaders utilised the media as a tool to implement their policies and goals in terms of re-educating people and creating political mobilisation. The media was therefore compelled to operate as a mouthpiece of the communist party and the government by reporting and publishing their messages and activities, instead of reporting about real events in society. To illustrate, Koltsova (2006, p.24) states that:

The Soviet political elite openly proclaimed that propaganda for the policy of "the Party and the government" and upbringing of "decent citizens of the Soviet society" was the most significant task of Soviet journalists. Even the Soviet term for mass media.... reflected this idea.

Overall, media from the communist era in former Soviet Union countries was completely controlled since the journalists worked within the limited boundaries set by the leaders (Koltsova, 2006, p.24-25), and people's needs and interests were not important to the government (Voltmer, 2008, p.29). Additionally, since all of the mass media outlets were appointed by communist party bodies, most of them were loyal to the party and were therefore not independent or free; to illustrate, Koltsova (2006, p.26) notes:

Party bodies appointed all media executives, and all of them were obliged to be Party members. Sometimes they were recruited from within media organisations and were elected to the corresponding Party committees after appointment. But, in many cases they were chosen from among Party functionaries, who were quite ignorant of journalism, and for whom such appointments were just an interim step in their

Party career. Techniques of recruitment also included ideological education at journalism departments of universities, severe job competition and institution of “tutors” for young journalists at their workplaces. All this ensured selection of the most politically loyal people.

Despite the direct influence of the different organs of the communist party, many other bodies affected the mass media in the Soviet Union. According to Koltsova (2006, p.26), organisations, ministers and anyone with any power could affect media production via the party bodies.

Arutunyan (2009, p.14) further describes the mass media situation of the communist era by arguing that prior to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991, legislation decreed that only the government and communist party were authorised to circulate periodicals and launch other media outlets. Citizens were banned from circulating any periodicals, but in 1990 a decree was issued by Mikhail Gorbachev (the last president of the Soviet Union), which lifted censorship and restrictions on citizens, allowing them to establish their own newspapers (White and McAllister, 2006, p.183). However, this did not change the rights of the mass media in Russia or in any of the other former Soviet Union republics, since the formal attitude toward the mass media was extremely strict and could not be changed easily by a decree. Besides, overcoming the legacy of the Communist Party’s authoritarian and centralized media system, which lasted for almost seven decades, was not easy. To illustrate:

Under the Soviet system, a journalist and what he wrote was fully controlled by the Communist Party, which funded and hence controlled all publications, television and radio networks across the country. Without a private printing press, it was also the Communist Party that dictated the cost of printing, materials and distribution. The funds for each medium – newspaper, radio, television – were allotted directly by the Press Ministry in much the same way as ideology was dictated from above. To a certain extent, publications could allot a certain amount of profit from sales for their own budgets, but mostly the revenue generated by a publication went back into the Press Ministry, while a publication’s budget was structured according to strict regulations stipulated from the top (Arutunyan, 2009, P. 30).

Nonetheless, Arutunyan (2009, p.14), considers Mikhail Gorbachev’s decree as the most important procedure in Russian history, affecting the freedom of the media. This decree allowed non-government and non-partisan individuals and groups to establish

their own media outlets. This introduced a new period of mass media, especially in terms of the deliberate criticism of various events and subjects previously forbidden.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union brought a new and supportive atmosphere to the media; however, many problems still posed serious obstacles to the development of the media in countries with a communist past. In this new era, serious challenges faced unprepared mass media establishments, including the suspension of funding from the state and the restriction of commercialisation of many of the media outlets – this led to the failure of many media organisations. Voltmer (2008, p.30) further comments on the problems for the mass media in the new post-communist democracies by arguing that the governments and political parties continued to interfere with the mass media and “the relationship between governments and the former state broadcasters turned public service broadcasting organizations has been highly disputed over the years” (Voltmer, 2008, p.30).

Unhealthy relationships between the government and the media outlets, which were previously operated by the government, continued even after the transition to public service bodies. Furthermore, the political leaders in these countries were afraid of relinquishing complete independence to the mass media and consequently often attempted to maintain their dominance over the media outlets. The leaders were aware of the importance of the mass media as an instrument of communication, especially during elections where the media channels were utilised by the power elites to directly communicate the party’s opinions to other social groups; consequently, other organisations, people and social groups’ opinions may also have been excluded. Another problem in post-communist societies is the politicisation of the mass media. In these countries, usually the media organisations are politicised and stand for a specific party’s policy, religious movement or ethnic group, in the long-term this is likely to lead to a decline in their credibility (Voltmer, 2008, p.30).

In Russia for instance, new legislation came into effect to regulate the media after the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, this new legislation did not give unrestricted rights to the establishing of media outlets or even periodicals, these prerequisites restricted and created problems in the registration and establishment of new media outlets (Arutunyan, 2009, p.14). In fact, the actual commencement of transformation for the mass media in Russia can be linked directly to two historic events: the downfall of the Berlin wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union. According

to Koltsova (2006, p.29) and Voltmer (2000, p.472), in the 1980s when Mikhail Gorbachev, the president of the former Soviet Union, set *glasnost*¹⁷ as important to society, to some extent the media benefited from this openness in a similar way to other political, societal and economic sectors. However, Gorbachev considered the media as a tool for supporting his reform and reconstruction programme, entitled *perestroika*,¹⁸ changing the way the state controlled its media outlets. In this regard, Krasnoboka (2002, p.483) considers *perestroika* as a golden era of the mass media in this country stating that:

Perestroika was a golden age of public journalism. Neither before nor even after perestroika were the Soviet journalists so independent and respected in their job. Immediately, the first uncensored words united society around the journalists and put them in the vanguard of the political and social transformations in society.

People in the former Soviet Union, even in the remote areas, could receive several broadcast channels including national, republican and even local channels, in addition to many newspapers and magazines that were circulated. However, the mass media were strictly censored by the communist party and by the journalists' self-censorship – an attribute of journalists in this region. Thus, even liberal journalists and writers were unable to publicise their opinions and views because of the strict surveillance by the communist party's security services (Krasnoboka, 2002, p.483).

Nevertheless, in the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, in general the media in Russia made noticeable achievements in terms of plurality and freedom. According to Becker (2004, p.147-149), it is worth considering the post-glasnost period of the Soviet Union, since in this time the media developed considerably during the presidency of Boris Yeltsin through the 1990s. In fact, the state's intervention in the media has always been a feature of government methods for dealing with the mass media in Russia; it should be noted that Yeltsin, himself, was not opposed to the use of the state's influence to threaten opposition media (Becker, 2004, p.147). Although eventually it was argued that Yeltsin supported and encouraged media freedom (Gessen, 2000, p.17, cited in Becker, 2004, p. 147). Yeltsin's actions had a positive

17 - *Glasnost* refers to openness and publicness; it is derived from the Russian word *glas* (voice) (for more detail see Koltsova, 2006, p.29).

18 - *Perestroika* is a Russian word means rebuilding and reorganisation (for more detail, see Koltsova, 2006, p.29).

impact on this sector, leading to growth in media outlets and media freedom which allowed journalists and writers to criticise and comment on state policy and other strategic issues, including the war in Chechnya and corruption within the country. Furthermore, several private TV outlets emerged between 1992 and 1993, and by 1995, five private TV channels were founded in the country (Koltsova, 2006, p.36).

In the same way, during Yeltsin's presidency, ordinary citizens were capable of participating in debates concerning common and political issues (McNair, 2000, p.93, cited in Becker, 2004, p.148). However, the media openness observed in this new democratic country did not last long. In the following period, Vladimir Putin utilised state intervention and control over the media to increase the extent to which the mass media experts could compare the system in Moscow; Putin's presidency demonstrates a neo-authoritarian approach to dealing with the mass media. To illustrate further, Becker (2004, p.148) notes that the ways in which the state deals with the media during Putin's rule created a neo-authoritarian media system whereby the government attempted to build self-censorship among the journalists by creating an environment of distrust and suspicion – this eventually led to a deficient mass media. In addition, there were strict controls on the media outlets owned by the government.

In the neo-authoritarian systems, private or independent media outlets are formally permitted; however, the state or dominant political parties create various barriers in order to repress media freedom. Barriers included depriving private media outlets of government advertisements and subsidies, targeted tax disadvantages and other tactics. Most of the techniques utilised by the neo-authoritarian system in Russia aimed to silence criticism within the media, thus impeding freedom of speech. Predominately, these techniques are economic pressures and selective use of specific law articles which impose criminal and civil penalties on journalists for issues that are deemed to be libellous, violate national security, the state's interests or even the current president's image, all these resulted in the inefficiency of media (Becker, 2004, p.149). Besides, there are problems in the neo-authoritarian countries' judicial systems meaning that they could not always function effectively or independently of the senior officials or political parties. Thus, decisions against journalists and media outlets are generally made after considering the interests of the power elite and political parties' interests. Equally, Arutunyan (2009, p.14) describes the new situation of the mass media in the new Russia federation as:

In 1991, the Soviet Union fell apart and the communist party tumbled from power, leading to the creation of the Russian Federation. New or not, it was, nevertheless, a media that spoke and wrote in the same language, and, more importantly, relied on the same Soviet-era broadcasting, printing and distribution infrastructure. Through this language and infrastructure, Russia's post-Soviet media inherited the same cultural traditions and the same dependence on the state that governed the preceding 300 years of journalism.

Concurrently, economic and legislative difficulties and obstacles affected media freedom and the governments of such systems may therefore even be inclined to use physical violation against journalists if they contradict them (Becker, 2004, p.149). To illustrate, in Russia, the situation of mass media became even worse compared to the 1990s, and mass media channels and their journalists were once again at risk from political and economic pressures from the state. The minute the government feels that a media outlet has crossed the line, and threatens so-called national state interests, it openly uses its power to influence media messages and silence free voices. A prime example of this can be seen in 2001 when gunmen who were linked to the government seized the head office of NTV, the most prominent private television station in this country, for reasons related to media work (White and McAllister, 2006, p.184). Moreover, the legacy of government censorship and control on the media in Russia continues to have a deep and permanent influence as the government is continuously forging its national media by establishing alternative media channels, which serve its goals and lead the public's opinion in the state's favour (Arutunyan, 2009, p.13). Consequently, it appears as though hopes to improve the media in this country to an acceptable standard are elusive, as the international agreements in place, concerning the freedom of expression and free media works, seem to have no impact on improving the media situations because of the power elite (White and McAllister, 2006, p.184).

Concerning media ownership in Russia, LaMay (2001, p.16) believes that economic blocs which are closely related to the political powers and senior figures have affected the state's ownership of the mass media. As such, three blocs now practically dominate the private sector's media outlets. Consequently, it is difficult to challenge the threats, impedances and pressures that come from the government as many of the TV channels, radio stations and periodicals are now operated solely by the government and are therefore subject to the state's control.

In general, in Russia like elsewhere, television channels dominate the mass media as citizens rely to a large extent on their news via TV. Furthermore, print media, including newspapers and magazines, has declined during the 1990s because of economic factors and the rapid growth in online journalism. Radio is still an effective mass media instrument in Russia as not all citizens have access to televisions; consequently, the radio is considered a key source of information especially for people in remote areas. On the other hand, there has been rapid growth in the number of citizens using the Internet; however, it still only constitutes a minor fraction of society and the majority of citizens have no access to this influential mass medium.

The role of online media is undeniable in societies transitioning to democracy; it is therefore considered a principal tool that can be utilised to influence the political situation in these societies. In addition, political news websites are very popular in newly democratised countries because they are influential in overcoming so-called state control and censorship, which if found, is not as in the totalitarian countries (Krasnoboka, 2002, p.479). Krasnoboka (2002, p.482) further states that online media in transition societies appears to be an independent instrument as government control and censorship are generally concentrated on more traditional media outlets. However, the Internet is relatively cheap and therefore has the potential to overcome these formal censors; thus, journalists in Russia have been motivated to work in this online environment as it is considered to be truly free as a mass medium when compared with other mass media channels. Nonetheless, there are problems in accessing the Internet in Russia and it appears that although this country ranks among the top six countries in the world for Internet use, a government-funded survey conducted in January 2014, shows that still many of its towns have no access to the internet at all, and thus a smaller number of the population in Russia use it compared to western countries (The New York Times, 2014; Arutunyan, 2009).

Similar problems impede the performance of the mass media in Ukraine. It has been argued that Ukraine's transition to democracy is similar to Russia's transition. In the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the transition in Ukraine has been affected, to a high extent, by the legacy of communist rule and the driving forces in this former system, since Ukraine was a pivotal part of the communist regime (Richter, 2002, p.133). However, as a country it was more open and had a properly structured legal framework for media freedom when it became independent. Consequently, there

are apparent differences between the media in Russia and Ukraine. For example, it is believed that Ukraine has one of the best media regulation frameworks in Europe (Krasnoboka, 2002, p.483). Richter (2002, p.133) agrees that the early phase of the Ukrainian transition is characterised by the approval of comprehensive modern laws that favour media improvement. This initiated the establishment of a wider set of regulations to manage and organise all types of mass media outlets including print, broadcast and even new technologies. Consequently, media development in Ukraine was stimulated by a high level of western media investment as well as by international pressures from global organisations such as the: United Nations, Council of Europe, Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO). In addition, Ukraine demonstrated commitment toward various international treaties (Richter, 2002, p.148); contributions from these international organisations led the authorities in Ukraine to formulate and model new regulations to help them establish proper legal grounds for their mass media. The statutes passed by the Ukrainian parliament would eventually regulate almost all aspects of mass media, from media freedom, copyright, frequencies, circulation, penalties, journalist protection, taxes and even advertising, if implemented properly. However, many of these laws were not implemented properly by the courts and executives since the interests and agendas of many senior officials have impeded a proper implementation of the legislation (Richter, 2002, p. 133). They also attempt to lure media outlets through several benefits and by selective use of the law to maintain control over the mass media sector in order to guarantee their popularity and voter support (Richter, 2002, p.133). For instance, although the Ukrainian constitution in article 15 prevents any prior censorship on the media, executive institutions of this country have had significant impact over the media economy, particularly through the distribution of government subsidies among media outlets. For this purpose, presidential decrees were issued to exempt publications that were owned or established by the state or senior officials from VAT and to receive government subsidies (Richter, 2002, p.140).

In reality, there are further problems impeding the existence of a free and independent media in this country, as a result of the legacy this society has inherited from the previous communist rule whereby self-censorship and loyalty or affiliation to specific political parties are common. Krasnoboka (2002, p.483) believes that in

Ukraine this is because the journalists and media in general are linked directly to the ruling system through the main business-political communities; consequently, the main media channels are predominantly financially or politically linked to the supreme power in the country. As a result, their policy and political attitudes are to an extent reflected in their media messages. In effect, mass media outlets have created a camouflaged democracy, by claiming that they are supported by democratic values, freedom of expression, equal opportunities of access and other principles. Meanwhile, to some extent powerful governments still dominate the media on the basis of the old communist system as well as new techniques for impeding free media work. As such, the authorities and interest groups intentionally pressurise journalists. These new techniques are “structural censorship”, which is utilised to silence critical media and journalists. This consists of control over printed media and its profits; control of the distribution companies and the renting of properties/offices for media outlets; as well as, control over advertisements through directing and obliging major industries and companies to advertise only in government and loyal media outlets. Eventually, heavy formal censorships resulted and journalists could choose either to be silenced, either through practicing self-censorship or bankruptcy and closure (OSCE, 2001). In many new democratic countries, cases of such censorship and pressures on media work are reported. For example, in Russia and Ukraine even senior officials, especially in local authorities away from the capitals, implement these pressures as a tool to silence the critical media and journalists. Thus, the media working outside the capitals in these two countries with communist pasts are working under very constrained circumstances. Another common constraint for the Ukrainian mass media is that of bilingualism. The Ukrainian language suffered because of its restricted use during the Soviet Union where Russian was the dominant language and the language of power. Thus, Ukraine is still to an extent being influenced by the effect of the legacy of the former Soviet Union whereby the mass media was divided into the two main languages of Ukrainian and Russian, as well as a few other minor languages (Bolaniuk, 2010, p.108).

Physical termination, or “censorship by killing journalists”, is considered the most serious threat affecting journalistic work in new democratic countries such as Russia and Ukraine. Many cases involve the killing of journalists as a result of their work, and kidnappings in Russia and Ukraine commonly involve criminal gangs, mafia groups,

government officials or other ethnic or religious extremist groups (OSCE, 2001). One of the most prominent cases of killing a journalist in Russia concerns the murder of Anna Stepanovna Politkovskaya, which occurred on 7 October 2006 in front of her own house. Politkovskaya was a Russian human rights activist, writer and journalist known for criticising Putin's government policies and the Chechen War (Arutunyan, 2009; Roudakova, 2009; Azhgikhina, 2007; Shlapentokh, 2007). Moreover, in 2007 the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) reported that since 1993, 44 journalists have lost their lives in Russia while conducting journalistic duties and between 1993 and 1999; several of them were killed in the Russian military campaign against the Chechen (Arutunyan, 2009, p.70). At the same time, many have encountered insults or hostility from state or non-state agents of violence (Koltsova, 2006, p.65-66). Likewise, in Ukraine, journalists have been murdered for reasons relating to their work. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and after Ukraine became independent in 1991, more than ten journalists were killed in this country (Global Journalist, 2004).

To illustrate, Georgy Gongadze was murdered in the summer of 2000 by a former senior Ukrainian police officer, this police officer was involved with other higher government officials. Gongadze was a journalist and the editor-in-chief of the *Ukrainian Pravda* (Ukrainian Truth) an independent online newspaper which posted many stories exposing high levels of corruption and scandal relating to senior officials, including the president of the country (Barry, 2013; CPJ, 2012; BBC, 2009). In addition to being a serious crime, the threat of violence and even death silenced and curbed many investigative journalists in all media outlets, as they feared for their safety (OSCE. 2001).

The most recent violations against journalists and media in these two countries occurred in 2014 during the military conflict in eastern Ukraine. It has been reported that several journalists have encountered violations, been kidnapped and killed in the military conflict in the east of Ukraine, and many Russian TV channels and their reporters have been banned in this country. Likewise, in Russia, many Ukrainian websites were also blocked, and a blogger was placed under house arrest and banned from using the Internet for two months because of criticizing the Russian intervention in Crimea and Ukraine (The New York Times, 2014; The Guardian, 2014; CPJ, 2014a; Reporters Without Borders, 2014b).

In Ukraine, the government operates a number of state television and radio stations; in addition, the political and economic elite also control the majority of the television broadcasts, whether terrestrial or satellite channels, because television broadcasts are considered important instruments in affecting public opinion, especially during elections. In contrast, the radio environment is different as it is predominantly out of the politicians' reach. Richter (2002, p.146) believes that the radio stations in this country are not considered significant as they generally broadcast music and entertainment programmes and are therefore not as effective as television broadcasts for the politicians. The Internet's development was hampered during the 1990s by factors such as poor telecommunications infrastructures and high taxes; it has since evolved and is playing an improved and important role in the transition of society (McFaul, 2007, p.62; Kuzio, 2006; Richter, 2002). Online journalism and the Internet are therefore significant in this country; to illustrate, they played an integral role in organising the Orange Revolution, which took place between late November 2004 and January 2005. According to McFaul (2007, p.63) this was the first revolution that depended on the Internet as a tool for planning and sustaining its revolution. Besides, it has challenged the Russian interventions in eastern Ukraine and the Crimean conflict in 2014, in a way that led to banning many Ukrainian websites in Russia, which reflects their effect on the public not only in Ukrainian society, but Russia's also.

5.4 Barriers to the media in Kurdistan

The problems identified from the examples of Russia and Ukraine also pose challenges to the Kurdish media. To illustrate, in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, society is still in transition – it is considered as an emergent democracy but it still has a deep legacy from the Ba'athist regime and is therefore suffering from problems similar to those in other new democratic societies. The media and journalists in this region face many difficulties concerning free work, safety, access to information and others. Eñmed Reşîd Mîre – the editor-in-chief of *Lvîn* magazine and *Lvînpress* the online news site – identifies many obstacles to free media work, most of which are linked to security problems and the non-implementations of existing media legislation:

Journalists in the Kurdistan region, especially those who are working for independent media outlets, have safety problems and they even face physical elimination in some cases and the power elite have an aggressive view towards the independent and opposition media.

Besides, the Presswork law does not apply for all media lawsuits from the judicial system and police institutions. In the meantime, poor financial capacity poses a significant barrier since the circulation of printed media has declined because of the development of online journalism on the one hand and the high proportion of illiteracy on the other. Moreover, journalists suffer from a lack of professionalism, and reporting about some critical subjects on religious, ethnic, societal and other subjects, is considered a red line for the journalists. Another problem is that the independent media suffers from financial problems and there is no legislation from parliament for supporting the independent media in Kurdistan (Appendix 6.1).

Likewise, Sardar Aziz – a Kurdish columnist and academic – believes that there are plenty of media outlets in the Kurdistan region; nonetheless, countless barriers to the media still exist. An abundance of media outlets does not necessarily mean that the Kurdish media has developed, and it should be noted that only a few of these Kurdish media channels are of a good quality in terms of commitment to professionalism and ethics of media. For Aziz (2013) the situation has worsened further in the region as information is continually reported and re-reported in different forms by the media, which eventually becomes uninteresting. Aziz also acknowledges illiteracy to be a crucial problem contributing to media failure, in addition to funding problems for the printed media outlets (Aziz, 2013).

5.4.1 Relationships between journalists and political figures

Unhealthy relationships between journalists and political elite in the Kurdistan region have affected the credibility of the messages of many media outlets. The political elite, who have become rich in the transition phase of Kurdish society, realise the importance of the mass media in supporting their positions and success during elections; consequently, it is in their interest to always interfere and maintain control over the media by deploying various techniques to achieve their wishes. One technique involves luring journalists in the independent media to their side using various forms of bribery, such as expensive gifts, monthly salaries or providing them with private and secret information that they can then publish.

To illustrate, Hiwa Osman – who was previously the Iraq country director for Institute of War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), media advisor to Iraqi former president Jalal Talabani and who also has worked as a writer and producer with BBC News – states that most of the senior political figures in the Kurdistan region have their own media channels. As a result, they are unlikely to care about other media outlets; this

has fostered the creation of unhealthy relationships between the region's officials and journalists (Appendix 6.6). Hiwa Osman – who currently runs the *Mediawan* foundations for journalism and journalistic training – further argues that officials exclusively provide their own media outlets, or media outlets that covertly relate to them, with information. Thus, independent media in general is deprived of valuable information, which results in some editors and journalists in the independent media resorting to using unknown or unreliable sources for their reports. Consequently, the conflict between journalists and officials often leads to a lack of credibility in their work (Appendix 6.6). Moreover, Kemal Reuf – editor-in-chief of independent *Shar* (City) magazine and *Sharpress* online news site- points out that there is a misunderstanding among the officials about their relationship with journalists and describes the unhealthy relationships between the officials and journalists as follows:

There is a misunderstanding among officials about their relationship with the journalists. They believe that if they have a friendship or a relationship with a journalist, this means that the journalist should turn a blind eye to their defects. Many officials have boycotted our phone calls only because we have criticized them in our reports. Therefore, I think the relationship is unhealthy (Appendix 6.7).

Other Kurdish journalists and academics also agree that the relationship between journalists and officials is poor. For example, Dana Es'ed – editor-in-chief of the independent *Awêne* online news site states:

The relationship between journalists and officials is without doubt unhealthy. In the Kurdistan region, there is no real democracy. The same faces who were ruling in the 1990s, are ruling now, this makes these officials deal with journalism and journalists in unhealthy ways. They have an aggressive attitude towards the journalists and consider them as their enemy, especially journalists from the independent media. These officials want to remain in power and have many interests, so they often deal aggressively with journalists (Appendix 6.2).

Sara Qadir – a lecturer at the media department at the University of Sulaymaniyah and a reporter from the *Awêne* independent newspaper – makes a similar point and comments:

The officials have many secrets and they do not want journalists to know about [them]. Therefore, if a journalist has a strong link to an official, I put a question mark on him and on his work, because such a relationship may lead to common interests and make the journalist turn a blind eye to the official's defects. Such journalists, who are mercenary,

mainly exist in the shadow media; they work only for their own interest and have neglected the interest of the public (Appendix 6.10).

Likewise, Nyaz 'Ebdulla - reporter and program presenter at Radio Newa- argues that such an improper relationship, which is based on mutual interest, may harm the credibility of journalists:

In general, the officials of the political parties provide information to their loyal journalists and media outlets. I think that the relationship is unhealthy because the process of providing information to journalists is based on personal, partisan and political interests. These interests create unhealthy relations and make journalists a tool of the officials for publishing specific information. In this case, journalists lose their real character in spreading the truth to the people. I believe this unhealthy relationship exists in the context of the partisan and shadow media (Appendix 6.9).

5.4.2 Political interference, physical assaults and rival media

Interventions in the media, from the political parties and senior power elites, pose another impediment to the media in the Kurdistan region since they resort to questionable techniques to influence the independent/opposition media, or they subdue the mass media in their own favour. In recent years, a number of political elite figures have established their own mass media outlets, known as shadow media (*Mîdyay Sêber*)¹⁹ including satellite and terrestrial TV channels, radio stations, printed media and online news sites. Consequently, they take advantage of their position as they have huge budgets for their channels. These media outlets (including: *Rudaw* (Event) TV, radio stations, printed and online news site; *Xendan*: online news site and radio stations; *Chawder* (Observer) online and printed newspapers; Bas printed and online newspapers; and, many others) all act as shadow media (*Mîdyay Sêber*) outlets, which claim their independence so as to attract audiences; however, their policies tend to serve a particular person or group, either politically or economically. In this regards, Aziz argues that the political seniors have many close and loyal journalists who operate the various media outlets, to illustrate:

In the KRG, there is a special type of media; one can call it, special personal type of media. Political figures have a herd of mediocre writers

19 - Shadow media (*Mîdyay Sêber*) refers to those media channels that pretending to be independent; while in the covert, they are funded and run by political actors (senior officials) and/or parties.

and journalist with close personal loyalties to issue newspapers and websites in order to promote the political figure and more importantly to defend any criticism against the political figure. This was initially just a newspaper or a website, today satellite channels belong to certain political figures. The question is where one should get news: because every channel promotes certain types of news and use particular language game. The issue always is- whose news one gets (Aziz, 2013).

Kurdish journalists and media academics believe that this type of media provides the most threat to the media scene because they have no credibility as they pretend to be independent while they are actually founded or funded by certain political figures. In the Kurdistan region, this type of media is considered to be a certain style in the fight against the independent media (Awene, 2013b). To illustrate, Hiwa Osman claims that these shadow media outlets have no credibility because they mislead the audience:

The credibility of shadow media is in danger because they pretend to be something that they are not. For example, the parties' affiliated media show their identity, and when I get news from them, I know how much is true and real, while shadow media do not show their real identity (Appendix 6.6)

In the meantime, Hana Şwan Hesen – the editor-in-chief of Rêwan (The Guide) a specialist biweekly newspaper in women's affairs, which is openly sponsored by the PUK- suggests that every media outlet should reveal with whom they operate and by whom they are funded, so as not to mislead their audience or lose their credibility:

I am not with misleading the audience and this is achieved when the media channels declare their affiliations. For example, Kurdistanî Nwê (new Kurdistan) newspaper, has declared clearly that it belongs to the PUK, thus those who have different political views may not read this newspaper or may only be interested in some of its news and reports. It is important for the audience to know what they read and watch (Appendix 6.4).

Kemal Reuf, also comments on this aspect by stating that creating shadow media by the senior officials and political parties is another way of fighting against the independent media in the Kurdistan region. He comments:

There are several pressures on the media. At the beginning, the pressures were only classical such as threatening by sending messages, cutting salaries and others, though now the pressures are different. For example, power elite create their own media to compete with the independent media, which works to insult the independent journalists through spreading untrue propaganda (Appendix 6.7).

Essentially, the most dangerous physical assault and elimination threat to journalists results as a consequence of their work – this usually comes from a political party or senior official. Rubin (2013) claims that tackling the widespread corruption issues in the Kurdistan region is a risky mission, which frequently leads to fatal consequences for journalists, especially when it comes to reporting about senior political figures' illegal activities. The KJS is the official organisation funded by the KRG, although it is dominated by the two ruling parties, the KDP and PUK, it still reports on violations against journalistic work. According to a survey conducted by the KJS, in the five years (2008, 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012) 874 violations occurred, including murdering, kidnapping, detaining and other violations against journalists who were implementing their work (Dawdi, 2013). The proportion of violations in the years 2013 and 2014 has dropped noticeably. For example, in 2013, 75 violations against journalists had been registered by the KJS, while in 2014, only 33 violations had been registered (Peyam TV, 2015). The KJS's survey demonstrates that the worse year for Kurdish journalists in the aftermath of the removal of the Ba'athist regime in Iraq, was 2008. In 2008, four journalists were murdered for reasons relating to their works, these journalists will now be identified: 'Ebdulsetar Tahîr Şerîf was killed on 5 March 2008 in Kirkuk city; Bêgerd Qellatî was killed on 18 April 2008 in the Ranye district; Sirwe 'Ebdulwehab on 4 May 2008 in Mosul city; and, finally, Soran Mame Heme on 21 June 2008 in Kirkuk (Dawdi, 2013). Other cases whereby journalists were murdered or beaten were reported in the following year, for example: Serdeşt Osman a 23 year- old student and journalist was kidnapped in Erbil city and his body was later found in Mosul city on 6 May 2010 with marks of torture on it. Most of these violations are believed to be linked to journalistic work, including the reporting of corruption and injustice by criticising the authorities of the region. The organisation Reporters without Borders identified that between 2008 and 2010, two journalists were murdered for reasons relating to their media work, in addition, they noted that many others faced assault and pressure (Reporters without Borders, 2010). More recently, on 5 December 2013, gunmen in Kelar city, southeast to Sulaymaniyah city, shot down another journalist. Kawa Garmanyani who was a correspondent for the *Awêne* newspaper in Kelar, he also edited the monthly independent *Royal* magazine, he was shot dead by gunmen in front of his home for reasons related to reporting about corruption issues of some senior officials in the city (AFP, 2013; Sharpness, 2013;

Neurink, 2013). It is believed that several officials were involved in his murder, to illustrate, the World Bulletin (2013) notes:

Recently, journalist Garmyani had announced on his Facebook page that he had documents relating to a corruption case that he was planning to write about in 'Rayal' magazine... Kawa had been involved in disputes with local Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) leaders because of his investigative reporting and recently he registered a complaint with Garmyan police against one PUK official. Previously he had appeared in court for publishing the photo of an official in a report on corruption.

In addition, many journalists have been assaulted as a result of their work, especially in the independent media; a good example of this is the case of Asos Herdî a known journalist and former editor in chief of the independent *Awêne* (Miror) newspaper, this occurred in August 2011 (UNAMI, 2012). In this regard, Serdar Mîhemed – the current editor-in-chief of *Awêne* newspaper – stated that some gunmen beat Herdî pursuant to an order from a senior official (Appendix 6.11). On the other hand, according to the Metro Centre for Protecting Journalists' Rights, in 2011, 359 journalists in Iraqi Kurdistan were violated by gunshots, beatings, detentions, threats, the breaking of press equipment and many other violations; this number decreased somewhat in the following year whereby 132 journalists faced violations (Alsumaria News, 2013). The KJS announced almost similar statistics concerning violations against journalists for 2011 whereby 291 journalists were subjected to various violations (Regay Kurdistan, 2012), and in 2012, 105 journalists faced violations (PUKmedia, 2013). Shockingly, the offenders of these violations predominantly go unpunished as they have impunity, as they are either senior figures or political party security bodies (CPJ, 2014b).

5.4.3 Non-implementation of laws

The absence of an effective judicial system in this region constitutes another prominent impediment to media work. Almost all of the judges in the region have partisan affiliation as they were appointed by the executive authority, which is based on the ruling parties' recommendations; therefore, as in other new democratic countries, they usually take the interests of the government and partisan officials into their consideration. A survey conducted by the Smart Foundation for Media and Law Development in 2013 indicates that the majority of journalists in the Kurdistan region do not believe that the judicial system is independent in the region. Only 14% of journalists who participated in the survey trusted that the judges were independent,

while 59.5% of them believed the judicial system to not be independent, the participants also identified that they were unsure about the independency of the judges (Cahtypress, 2013). The journalists in the region are predominantly concerned with the non-implementation of laws by the judiciary system or the executive power. Sîrwan Xerîb – the editor-in-chief of *Xendan* the online news site, which is one of the most viewed among the Iraqi online websites according to the *Alexa.com* website (the web information company), believes that there is good legislation concerning media work in the Kurdistan region; however, the problem is that it is not implemented by the judicial system. This legislation has therefore not helped in improving journalists' work conditions. Xerîb states:

It depends on the judges, but since there is no explicit law, they resort to the use of the old law, which we, as journalists, believe is a violation. Besides, the law of the Presswork of Kurdistan No.35 is elastic and most of the judges deal with journalists according to their moods (Appendix 6.13).

In addition, Hêyder Cemîl Mîhemed Sallî – the editor-in-chief of the *Kurdiu* online news site, which is funded by the Kurdistan Islamic Union party (KIU), points out that there is selective use of the old and new legislation within the judicial system's management of media lawsuits (Appendix 6.3). He further states:

The laws relating to the media work are elastic and not implemented properly. We have the Presswork law, while many journalists have been tried according to the Iraqi old penal law. This fact has brought chaos to Kurdish journalism (Appendix 6.3).

Dana As'ed, has a similar opinion by acknowledging that the laws are not implemented in the courts, adding:

The problem is that in the Kurdistan region, the laws are passed but not implemented. For example, in the new Presswork law No.35 there is an article that asserts to not arresting journalists, while many courts and police stations are still using the Iraqi penal law of 1969, thus journalists have been detained for days (Appendix 6.2).

Ehmed Reşîd Mîre makes a similar point and adds:

The problem is that the laws are not implemented properly in the courts and still Iraqi's old penal law number 433 is in effect, which allows the detention of journalists for their work. For example, I currently have this problem (Appendix 6.1).

For Nyaz 'Ebdulla also, the non-implementation of the laws is a serious barrier to media:

The most prominent obstacle to journalists in the Kurdistan region is non-implementation of the Presswork law No. 35 (Appendix 6.9).

Similarly, Şwan Muħemed believes that if the laws were implemented properly, the violations against journalists would decline:

If the laws and the decisions that are approved by parliament and the KRG are implemented properly, I believe this will decline the violations to an extent, but in the elections and demonstrations, the journalists are always the victim of the violations (Appendix 6.12).

Again, Hana Şwan Ĥesen argues that the non-implementation of the new Presswork law and the fact that the old Iraqi penal law is still being implemented is one of the most prominent challenges to the journalists working in the Kurdistan region. She provides the following as an example when, on 27 August 2013, three journalists were sued by the court based on the old Iraqi penal law because the judges always seem to have an excuse for using this law. According to Ĥesen, when the judge was asked why he resorted to using the old Iraqi penal law with the journalists rather than the new press law approved by the Kurdistan parliament in 2008, he stated “that is all they have for now” (Appendix 6.4).

5.4.4 Access to information

Access to information is considered one of the initial rights of journalists, as this will allow them to perform their duty well. In newly democratised societies, journalists have often been deprived of this right by the authorities, societal groups or by other pretexts. For journalists, severe restrictions still prevent access to government information in many developing societies. Nonetheless, the depriving of information from journalists can take many forms, the most prominent involving preventing journalists from accessing specific sites for news events by either police officers or personal security guards, or by not responding to the journalists’ requests for specific government or public information (LaMay, 2001, p.3).

Hevall Ebubekir – an academic and experienced journalist and lecturer from the media department at the University of Sulaymaniyah – believes that hiding information from journalists has become a widespread phenomenon among all institutions in the region. He claims that even a small public service department hides information as they think that revealing even ordinary information may threaten the national security of the country:

The trust is absent between the media outlets on one hand and the political power and the official departments, on the other hand. Therefore, pressures emerge and the political power thinks that the media will ruin their work. The problem is that everyone, even in a small public service department, thinks that by concealing information, the political system will be safe, while in fact only transparency promotes the political system (Appendix 6.5).

On the other hand, Dana Es'ed, believes that because of reasons relating to corruption, journalists cannot access information. He comments:

In the Kurdistan region, no one can access information. The reasons for this are many, but the most prominent reason is corruption, which has reached a high level. For example, no journalist can enter the ministry of natural resources of Kurdistan and ask for information about any oil contract. This situation has made the journalists resort to anonymity and unknown news sources (Appendix 6.2).

Other journalists blame the KRG for not making any effort to solve the problem of lack of access to information. For example, Kemal Reuf states:

Although we suffer from a lack of access to information, the journalists do not see any prospects that the KRG establish a department for providing the journalists with the information (Appendix 6.7).

This problem often faces journalists from the independent and opposition media outlets since most of the senior officials have their own media outlets and party affiliated media are unenthusiastic about obtaining important information; for this reason, journalists from independent media outlets commonly criticise officials in the region for their lack of transparency. For instance, Eħmed Reşîd Mîre states:

In general, partisan journalists are living in grace and they don't have serious problems; they do not make any effort to get interesting information, they have good salaries and permanent jobs (Appendix 6.1).

The right of access to information should be guaranteed by the Presswork law (No. 35) of 2007, which confirms the right of journalists to obtain information, which serves the public's interest. More importantly, in the summer of 2013, the Kurdish parliament passed a special law allowing access to information for journalists and even ordinary citizens. This law, in article 18, imposes financial fines on any government employees or officials who refrain from providing information (KurdNet, 2013). However, the problem as mentioned earlier is that the authorities do not properly implement law relating to the media work.

5.4.5 Financial problem: low circulation and ads

Another serious problem affecting mass media is the financial impediment, which mainly faces the independent media outlets. Şwan Muħemed believes that the decline in circulation of printed media is a global crisis that has also swept across the Kurdistan region. An example of this, according to Şwan Muħemed, who is also the former editor-in-chief of *Awêne* independent newspaper, involves the decline of *Awêne*'s circulations from around 17,000 to almost 3,000 (Appendix 6.12). Other journalists in the independent media agree that declines in printed media circulation have led to reduced income and profits. One of the main reasons for the emergence of this problem in the Kurdistan region, according to Eħmed Reşîd Mîre, is the high level of illiteracy among the people and the absence of legislation from parliament to allocate fair financial support to the independent mass media outlets (Appendix 6.1). At the same time, interventions by senior political figures have occurred with the establishment of their own and loyal mass media channels, either printed, broadcast or online news sites; this has deepened the problem further as the independent media outlets' audiences have dispersed in their favour. Kemal Reuf states that the increasing number of media outlets is one of the reasons for the financial problems faced by independent media; he states that:

The increasing number of media outlets such as television channels and online news sites in the recent years, resulted in the reduction of printed media audiences. This has led to creating chaos in the media market and declines in sales of printed media, which constitute the cornerstone of independent media incomes. Besides, the rate of limited advertisements has dropped as well (Appendix 6.7).

As such, in recent times, the private or independent printed media outlets cannot rely on sales for their sustenance and instead need to depend more on advertisements. However, it is also difficult to obtain advertisements as these are directly influenced by the political elite and government advertisements in the Kurdistan region, as in other emerging democracies. Almost all of the government advertisements go to the media outlets that are affiliated to the parties in power. In addition, the majority of commercial advertisements in the region also go to the ruling parties' affiliated semi-formal media outlets or the outlets that are owned by senior political figures, since the majority of companies and business are owned and run by these political actors. Moreover, since the ruling parties or senior officials own the majority of the large

companies in different sectors, they accordingly usually only advertise in their loyal media outlets instead of the independent media. According to Hiwa Osman, advertisements are utilised as a means of pressure by senior officials to silence the independent media from reporting about corruption (Appendix 6.6). Sara Qadir likewise believes that the ruling parties have monopolised the advertising market:

The main problem is that the ruling parties are monopolising the market of government and commercial ads. The majority of the large companies are owned either by the political parties or senior officials who basically assert that the ads go to their own or loyal media outlets depriving the independent media of ads, which accordingly puts the independent media in a critical financial situation (Appendix 6.10).

This financial problem has in turn led to deficiencies in the independent media sector. It has resulted in a lack of professionalism by journalists who were financially affected and then unable to hire experienced and qualified journalists and editors. In addition, most independent media outlets are also incapable of running training courses to increase the professionalism of their journalists. Sîrwan Xerîb – who previously worked as a journalist and editor for *Awêne* and *Hawllatî*, the independent newspapers – believes that this financial problem has led to an inability by the independent media channels to hire staff and journalists with adequate experience. Accordingly, most of the journalists working in the independent media sector are volunteers or have low salaries; this has created a sector that is lacking in professionalism (Appendix 6.13). Furthermore, the emergence of new wealthy media channels will always be at the expense of the independent media. The first step for these new wealthy channels is for them to be mostly or party affiliated with senior figures, they work by luring experienced journalists from the independent media who are experiencing low salaries. As a result, this has led to a migration of experienced journalists from the independent media to rich media channels affiliated to the political parties or linked to senior politicians. Luring journalists from the independent media by providing higher salaries to work in the shadow media channels is a form of pressure on the independent media. According to Serdar Mîhemed, luring the journalists is one of the authority's fights against the independent media:

Because of the lack of salaries, journalists from the independent media have started to leave in favour of those media channels that provide high salaries. I believe this is a part of the authority's plans against the independent media (Appendix 6.11).

5.4.6 Absence of unified written language

Language is another prominent challenge affecting the mass media in the Kurdistan region. Essentially, the Kurdish language constitutes of two main dialects and a few other sub-dialects, it is predominantly written in three scripts, Latin, Arabic and Cyrillic (Sheyholislami, 2010, p.292; Blau, 1996, p.23). The absence of a standard Kurdish written language has created chaos in the media. According to Sîrwan Xerîb, the Kurdish mass media has suffered from not having a unified or standardised language; as a result, each of the Kurdish media outlets has its own style of writing and formal speech. Furthermore, he suggests that specialist academic institutions of language, in the Kurdistan region, should work on improving the Kurdish language (Appendix 6.13). Likewise, Kemal Reuf - who also worked as editor-in-chief of *Hawlatî* newspaper for almost six years- agrees with Sîrwan Xerîb by referring to this same problem, stating that:

Until now, we could not achieve a consensus about a unified writing language and this is a common problem of the different Kurdish media outlets (Appendix 6.7).

In the same way, Şwan Muñhemed, argues that the Kurdish language is appalling across all sectors in the region. He blames the government for the weakness of the Kurdish language, stating that:

The Kurdish language is in an awful situation in all aspects including media and political sectors since the Kurdish government and the specialist institutions do not want to work on creating a standard language on the nation's level, whereas they usually work on expanding the local dialects instead. Accordingly, this is reflected in media whether printed, online or broadcast (Appendix 6.12).

5.4.7 Copyright

The existence of an effective special law for protecting intellectual property and product rights is, in general, an important aspect of regulating media work. The ineffectiveness of the law is problematic for the media and other intellectual aspects in Kurdish society. In the Kurdistan region, in 2012, the law of Rights of Inventors (Copy Rights) No.17 had been approved by parliament, though since this statute is still not in effect, therefore, there is chaos among the increasing number of Kurdish media outlets and even many journalists are not aware of the existence of such law. With the exception of some of the satellite television channels and a few restrained printed

newspapers and magazines, violation of intellectual property and product rights has become a widespread phenomenon amongst most media channels, including terrestrial television channels, radio stations, printed media and online news sites. The online news sites and personal websites have only increased the dilemma of copyright, especially as these websites are not accountable for what they publish in terms of obtaining permission to publish intellectual products or properties of others (this will be discussed in more detail in chapter 7). To illustrate, Mîre considers the violation of copyright a threat to the credibility of journalists:

Journalists should maintain in journalism credibility, since most of what the online news sites post is not their own material and they copy from other websites or media outlets (Appendix 6.1).

5.5 Conclusion

The mass media is considered to be the most important instrument for consolidating democracy in transforming societies; in particular, it can contribute to raising the level of public awareness as well as increasing independent understanding of the features of the political, educational, social and economic sectors. Obviously, the freedom of media in societies with authoritarian pasts, which are in transition to democracy, often face challenges from various sources. Interests and ambitions of the political and power elite, economic blocs, corrupt journalists, religion, societal groups and other factors can all affect the media scene by creating complex barriers.

The media in the Kurdistan region is suffering from the bulk of these problems, similar to the media transition in any new democratic country. With regards to the Kurdish community, various problems affect the media in terms of the dominant religious and tribal beliefs and traditions, as well as problems inflicted by dominant sectors such as the political powers and economic blocs which pose serious barriers to the development of the media in Kurdistan. To an extent, steps have been taken by the ruling system in terms of legislation for the media; however, these steps are not effectively reflected as the new legislation still needs further modifications, and they are not being implemented successfully by the judiciary, the executive powers, or because of the politicization civil society organizations.

As this chapter has shown, various problems are affecting the media in the Kurdistan region. Consequently, many urgent actions are needed in order to improve

the media condition, especially with regards to: monitoring the implementation of the laws that have been passed by parliament; creating a national unified standard written language; reforming the judiciary system; and, legally guaranteeing the equal distribution of governmental ads. More importantly, the police and other state forces should be educated and be familiar with the appropriate and proper ways for dealing with journalists, in order to allow them to legally and safely conduct their work, particularly in times of conflict and demonstrations.

Obviously, it will be difficult for the Kurdish media to overcome these many problems, since the power elite still retain a legacy that is led by substantial political and economic interests which are confronting the free media work; however, this is needed in order for society in the region to overcome the deep legacy of the Ba'athist regime. Furthermore, the mass media needs to focus on a few specific areas in order to withstand these difficulties, especially in terms of independent media. As such, it is important for the journalists to focus on professionalism, credibility and impartiality in order for their work to be independent and in order for them to maintain their audiences by truly and independently reporting the different aspects within their society.

This chapter has raised key issues concerning the role which media can play in new democracies and about concerns over the roles of partisan and non-partisan media. It has also developed a thorough understanding of the situation of media work in new democracies through examining adequate relevant evidences and information. This chapter also explored the most common impediments to media work in the Kurdistan region from the perspectives of Kurdish journalists and academics and by examining various evidences, in addition to identifying similarities and differences from Kurdish media situations with media of other emerging democracies.

Chapter 6: Internet and public sphere

6.1 Introduction

For understanding the role of the web and online journalism in the creation of a public sphere in the Kurdistan region, it is essential to understand the influences of the internet on the public sphere. This chapter provides a full understanding of the notion of the public sphere and its relationship to the internet. It also examines the role of the web and online journalism in the public sphere in Kurdish society.

A good way to explore the relationship between the public sphere and the Internet, and the nature of the public sphere in the Kurdistan region, is through discussing this topic with the interviewees, who are experienced Kurdish journalists working in online journalism and traditional media channels (independent and partisan), and also academics and media trainers. This is important because the perspectives of these interviewees provide a greater understanding of the role of the Internet in providing a space for people in Kurdish society to debate and discuss issues of common interest, and illustrate how this new medium constitutes an alternative tool for individuals through which to participate in public debates.

In this chapter, in the discussion of the role of the Internet in the public sphere and freedom of speech, and the public sphere in Kurdish society, primary data from the in-depth interviews have been used to examine the role of various types of websites in the public sphere, as these offer a space for free speech in the Kurdistan region to individuals and promote participation in public debates, and also consider the features of the Internet that support such participation.

The public sphere, which is a controversial concept, represents a way of thinking about the space where people can discuss common issues, exchange opinions and express themselves freely. As history shows, this phenomenon has developed over time starting from modest goals and mediums to the present day, where mainstream media, the internet, civil society organizations and other bodies functioning as mediums in expanding the participation and expression of individuals and groups in public debates. The public sphere is one of the ways in which the transformation of the media by the internet has been thought about, but generally in relation to western democracies. For instance, Yochai Benkler in *The Wealth of Networks*, argues that with

the emergence of the internet and new technologies of media and communication, people have gained additional autonomy and they are no longer subject to the domination of the centralized mass media and communication industries. He believes that a networked information environment is better than the traditional mass media for serving the individuals so they can be active participants in public debates (Benkler, 2006, p. 212). The potential of the internet in enhancing the public sphere, which requires the guarantee of freedom of speech and publishing opinions, is a key condition according to the Habermasian normative model (Habermas, 1974, p. 49), and is still an ongoing and controversial subject.

As such, this chapter focuses on the notion of the public sphere and seeks to address the existing arguments, its types and elements. Moreover, it focuses on the role of the internet as a medium of the public sphere, democracy, and freedom of speech, and it looks at the public sphere in Kurdish society as an emerging democracy and the role of the internet in this regard.

6.2 The public sphere: concept and emergence

Jürgen Habermas the German social philosopher, explains the idea of the public sphere as an aspect of the social life of the people where they gather to discuss, criticize rationally and exchange their opinions about important common and public affairs, especially subjects of political concerns so that public opinion can be created. According to Habermas's descriptive notion, the existence of the public sphere in contemporary societies goes back to the ancient Greek developed city- states during the High Middle Ages, where the citizens were able to contribute in political debates in the *Agora*,²⁰ which was a specific place where people were able to exchange their views and debate about common affairs (Habermas, 1962/1989, p. 3). In the later periods, new forums appeared in Europe and England for the same reasons such as coffee houses, salons, city halls, royal courts, parliament halls and newspapers. Moreover, the new sociability and rational-critical debates that grew in the forums depended on the rise of national and territorial power states based on the capitalist

20 - The agora was the heart of the ancient Greek city and was the main political, civic, religious, and commercial centre (Odugbemi, 2008, p. 17).

commercial economy and this led to the formation of the institutions of civil society separate from the state and the economy. These institutions, including newspapers, salons (France), coffee houses (England), table societies (Germany) and colonial-era town halls, eventually led to the idea that society is separate from the state (Calhoun, 1992, p. 7; Habermas, 1962/1989).

The term 'public sphere' is usually used to refer to the virtual space where people communicate and exchange their views about common and public affairs (McKee, 2005). This concept cannot be described as an institution or organization; it is a network for sharing and exchanging opinions and information. It is also considered as a physical location where citizens gather sometimes to debate and discuss about public and common subjects and then decide what to do about them (Odugbemi, 2008, p. 27). For Habermas (1996, p.360) the public sphere is a social phenomenon and he describes it as a network for exchanging information and opinions. It is also a domain of people's 'social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed' (Habermas, 1974, p. 49), where participation to all individuals is guaranteed. He believes that a part of the public sphere emerges as a result of any conversation by the individuals who gather to form a public body. Consequently, they behave as a public body when they discuss in a free fashion with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and freedom to express and spread their points of view about various issues and subjects of common interest (Habermas 1997, p. 105; Habermas, 1974, p. 49).

Other scholars, such as Odugbemi define the public sphere as a 'democratic public sphere' because as he believes, there can be authoritarian ones also. He describes the democratic public spheres as 'a normative ideal which represents that space between the state and the household where free and equal citizens come together to share information, to debate, to discuss, or to deliberate on common concerns' (Odugbemi, 2008, p. 17). Such a democratic public sphere is under-guided by several principles to emerge, such as open discussion of various issues of common and public concerns, the public use of reason, respecting facts and evidence in public discussions, right of reply, ability to compromise and the principles of a responsible media such as objectivity, accuracy, honesty and others. And it is not necessary for the public to have any connection with the decision-making authorities so they can debate together (Odugbemi, 2008, p. 29; Bohman, 2007, p. 61; McQuail, 2005, p. 172; Kellner, 2000).

On the other hand, Dahlberg outlines from Habermas's idealizing presuppositions, several normative conditions for the public sphere. These conditions include 'the reasoned exchange of problematic validity claims, reflexivity, ideal role taking, sincerity, formal inclusion and discursive equality, and autonomy from state and corporate power' (Dahlberg, 2004, p. 2).

It is also important to note that there are two main theoretical postures about the interactions that take place in the domain of the public spheres, and about the public sphere as a whole with interconnections of factors, institutions and structures which are: normative and descriptive (Koçan, 2008, p. 3). The descriptive conception of the public sphere seeks to get to an abstract or overall notion derived from particular examples of the historical development of political society and thus try to find out and describe what the public sphere is, why it is that way and how the public influence life politically and socially. While in contrast, the normative conception is a function of making a notion through thinking and reasoning that aims to explain what the public sphere should be (Koçan, 2008, p. 3).

In his theory, Habermas seeks to combine the aims of both descriptive realistic theory and normative theory, as he believes that it is necessary for a public sphere theory to 'fit and justify the deliberative democracy model' (Koçan, 2008, p. 9). His work depends on and is derived from the historical phases during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when social places such as salons, coffeehouses and debating societies were the heart of deliberations among European citizens. As such, he identifies several principles and values of how a public sphere should be and what elements should exist so it can succeed, such as equal access of the participants, freedom of expression and assembly, the existence of a medium, deliberation of public issues, freedom from political and economic control and response to each other (Habermas, 1974; Habermas, 1962/1989). Rational-critical argument is also one of the elements of the process of the emergence of a public sphere, which in its turn has its own rules such as avoiding emotive and emotional talks and concentrating on rationality in the discussions in addition to the critical discourses of the participants (Thornton, 1996; Calhoun 1992; Habermas, 1962/1989). Such discussion is central for the public sphere for guaranteeing the exchange of opinions (Bohman, 2004, p. 133-134).

Although Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* is considered the most important ground for developing this notion in the present day, it has also been the subject of much criticism (Dahlberg, 2005). For example, Chantal Mouffe believes that exaggeration in emphasising the consensus and denial of confrontation not only causes a lack of enthusiasm and disaffection with political participation, but it also could lead to crystallization of mass passions about subjects, which is too difficult to be controlled by the democratic process, and an 'explosion of antagonisms', which may destroy the essential basis of civility (Mouffe, 1999, p. 756). She also points out that 'every consensus exists as a temporary result of a provisional hegemony, as a stabilisation of power and that always entails some form of exclusion' (Mouffe, 1999, p. 756). Other scholars, who have criticized the Habermasian work of the public sphere, including Susen (2011), Fraser (1992) and Ryan (1992), have concentrated on the issue of gender. The feminist viewpoint on Habermas's work has underlined the exclusionary and elitist nature of the public sphere in its original notion. For example, in Fraser's argument, Habermas has developed the notion of the public sphere functions only as a space for wealthy men to practice their proficiency of governance, while he has excluded women and non-property owner classes.

Scholars also think that although the notion of the bourgeois public sphere assumes free access and public gathering of discussion, diversity, agreement and tolerance; in reality it was different since the bourgeois public sphere was dominated mainly by white, property-owning males. Therefore, other groups and classes' public spheres were developed in society as an alternative to represent their opinions and interests alongside the bourgeois public sphere, such as the proletarian class, women and others that were excluded from the bourgeois spaces of debating (Kellner, 2000; Maia, 2007).

6.3 Mass media, civil society and the public sphere

It is believed that the mass media in developed democracies is fundamental for helping the public to understand their society better (McConnell and Becher, 2002). McConnell and Becher (2002, p. 1) emphasize the significance of the mass media for the public sphere and argue that mass media's contribution to the public sphere is through three functions; first through providing people with necessary information about their world,

second, through stimulating discussion about different subjects and finally through 'encouraging informed decisions about available courses of action'. For them, the media is expected to act as a watchdog on government and society, it is a space of debates where different points of view are presented and heard, and interests are exposed. For Habermas, the mass media is crucial for creating and transforming the public sphere because it provides a forum for communication among the citizens. He claims that the commercialization of the newspapers and magazines in the nineteenth century undermined the public sphere through turning the press from a political body to business and replacing the news with entertainment (Butsch, 2009, p. 11; Garnham, 1990, p. 107; Habermas, 1989/1962, p. 169). He stresses the importance of the mass press for participants stating that they make use from the critical newspapers and weeklies to participate in arguments about the general rules 'governing in their own essentially privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and labour' (Habermas, 1997, p. 106-107).

In general, the public sphere in the media age mainly functions for identifying the issues and problems of the public and providing a space for the participants' expression. This needs a possible connection between the public sphere and the democratic mechanisms in a way that the public sphere spots and underlines issues of common concerns and then should be fed into the deliberations of representative, government and other state institutional bodies. Thus, the mass media mediates the public sphere and various state institutions, and to an extent has made the face-to-face interaction outdated and characterized instead by small and dispersed 'networks employing digital means of production and distribution' (Odugbemi, 2008, p. 28; Sassi, 2001, p. 102; Keane, 2000, p. 77).

Despite the significance of the mass media as a medium for the public sphere, it is also believed that it has shortcomings. For instance, Gerhards and Schäfer (2010, p. 3) believe that the mass media channels are controlled and dominated by journalists, experts and cooperative players and that ordinary citizens have a passive role and only receive messages. Besides, not all of the events, actors and debates in society have the same opportunity to be published or be presented through the mass media, which constitutes a main defect because it reduces the opportunity for a participatory public sphere.

Scholars see that in order to be effective and play a supportive role in creating and transforming the public sphere, mass media and communication means should be free so they can provide the necessary space for freedom of speech. As an example, Deane (2005, p. 177-178) believes that the major reason that makes mass media crucial for the existence of the public sphere is that it is assumed to act as the fourth estate to protect the public interests. He further argues that freedom of speech and gathering, a free media and the right of participation in debates and decision-making are preconditions for the public sphere. For Odugbemi (2008) freedom of speech is considered a prominent characteristic of the public sphere. As he points out, the public sphere has many characteristics, but the most prominent is the constitutionally guaranteed civil rights, particularly the freedom of speech and assembly. Overall, the democratic public spheres, like other social phenomena, in order to be effective should have many constitutional rights, elements and pillars. These constitutional elements functioning together are based on the fundamental principle of openness and publicity (CommGap, 2009; Odugbemi, 2008, p. 31; Splichal, 2006; McQuail, 2005; Kellner, 2000).

However, the mass media outlets are not the only mediums that function as a forum of the public sphere, but other civil society bodies also almost have similar roles and goals. No doubt, the public sphere is also considered as a domain of struggles for mass recognition by social groups that want to build a part of their identity, driven by the lack of attention paid to their necessities by the governance system (Torrekens, 2011, p. 106). Therefore, associations, institutions and activists of civil society that are not motivated directly by the political or commercial scene, play an important role in forming the public sphere and public opinion in order to affect the institutional framework of the state and the public (Slavko, 1999, p. 24).

6.4 Public sphere and democracy

Habermas believes that the political public sphere is like an amplifying board and a warning system for problems that must be dealt with by the political powers since they cannot be solved in another place. He argues that the public sphere besides its duty of detecting problems, displaying and amplifying the pressures that come from these problems, must provide conceivable solutions for the problems and effectively concentrate on them to make them key topics in order to be dealt with by the

parliamentary facilities. He also thinks that the ability of the public sphere in solving the problems of society on its own is restricted; however, this ability should be exploited to manage more actions of dealing with the problems that occur inside the political system (Habermas, 1996, p.359).

Overall, it is argued that the public sphere is the cornerstone for democratic societies where the government, political parties and elites need to hear various attitudes and opinions of their people. For example, Odugbemi (2008) believes that the opponents of the democratic public spheres are dictators and autocratic regimes because the existence of a democratic public sphere assists the democratic political system, and it is a permanent power for an efficient, responsive and accountable rule. It is also fundamental for the governments that work for enhancing accountability on a permanent basis. McKee (2005, p. 16) claims that the public sphere is essential for democratic societies that want all citizens to be free and treated equally and justly, because the authorities need to know how their ordinary citizens are thinking, and to ensure their participation in the establishment of consensus. While in contrast, in feudal societies, it is not necessary for the monarchs to know about the opinions of the ordinary citizens and their thinking, because they make all the significant decisions by themselves.

6.5 The internet: public sphere and freedom of speech

In general, the new technologies of the mass media have led to a remarkable reduction of the costs of printed and broadcasted media and have developed the delivery policy of the media, but the most important evolution is the advent and spread of the internet and the proliferation of other communication new technologies. Deane (2005, p. 180) believes that this evolution with the rapid reduction of communication costs in the aftermath of the liberalization of these communication and media industries has led to the creation of a milieu 'where communication increasingly happens between people horizontally, rather than being directed to people vertically'. Besides, because of the difficulty of censoring new communication and information technologies, even those societies in which their media outlets were subjected to the state's surveillance, have witnessed public spheres, and new forums of debates and discussions have been founded (Deane, 2005).

The development of the internet has increased people's hopes by being the tool for those people and topics that were marginalized previously so they can be noticeable. One of the most prominent characteristics of this new medium that has promoted hopes to change social communication among the people and to make and transfer the public sphere is the participatory ability. This promotes and expands communication to include many actors particularly from a civil society, enabling ordinary citizens in the meantime to participate in debates and media production as well. Eventually, the internet will possibly democratize the public sphere, which again increases opportunity for the people to participate and to be interested in political issues. The expectations of the internet's ability to be a better forum for the public sphere is that its communicational structure is different from the traditional mass media outlets in a way that it has reduced the role of editors and journalists, while in contrast it has enabled audiences to express themselves and present their subjects online easily. Besides, many actors of a civil society, including the small non-governmental organizations or ordinary citizens can express and present themselves effortlessly and with low-cost through the internet, and to do so, it is argued that a personal computer and an internet connection are enough, which are now available for too many people (Gerhards and Schäfer, 2010, p. 3). In the same way, scholars such as Benkler (2006, p. 11) believe that the public sphere that is created through the internet may empower many more individuals to express and communicate their opinions and notices to other people without the control of the media owners and it is 'not as easily corruptible by money as were the mass media'.

Another feature is that on websites, hypertext language (HTML) makes referencing easy and both types of websites; static and dynamic, are linked to the original sources allowing materials to be archived and accessible to anyone who has the reference. While in the mass media, where sending a long and detailed report to millions of audiences is difficult and costs a lot, audiences are not allowed to review the report alongside reading it. Benkler (2006, p. 218) points out that overall the culture of the web is fundamentally different from that of the mass media stating that on the web culture is heading toward 'see for yourself' where it allows the audience to search and link to the original sources of information.

In terms of freedom of expression, it is also argued that the internet has increased the possibilities of guaranteeing this right to the people. For instance, Balkin (2008)

claims that while numerous citizens use the internet, and information and communication new technologies in general to speak; they will identify their plans and programmes and express their opinions about many private or cultural issues and even they may discuss some subjects that exceed the borders. The information and communication new technologies grant ordinary people significant opportunities to say their words, to create and to spread information and opinions, therefore; they eliminate the central (decentralize) control over culture, over knowledge, over information production and over access to mass audiences (Balkin, 2008, p. 440-441; Benkler, 2006, p. 30). Furthermore, it is argued that anonymity online and virtual interaction as on the web, instead of face-to-face, helps the user to overcome identity constraints and this makes them communicate freely and openly, which in turn will enhance the exchange of opinions and expand freedom of speech (Papacharissi, 2004, p. 16). Generally, the main reasons that make the internet a hopeful tool to have participatory influences, is that it is an easily accessible medium with almost no barriers that provides the opportunity to various actors that have limited resources to access and participate in the public sphere much easier than traditional mass media allows (Gerhards and Schäfer, 2010, p. 12-13). Likewise, Benkler outlines two main characteristics of the networked information that raises hope for the expected proper medium to help in activating people in participation. The first one is the shift from the form of a 'hub- and-spoke' structure, with unidirectional structure of the mass media to a distributed structure with multidirectional connections. The second is the significant reduction of communication costs. These two characteristics have allowed internet users to be more active in the public sphere (Benkler, 2006, p. 212).

For political deliberation, the internet is considered an important medium since it enables the debates that lead to enhance a democratic exchange of various thoughts and views. It is considered a vital resource for political participation for those who have access to it. Nevertheless, only accessing the internet does not ensure growing political activity and participation, enlightened speech or more powerful and representative public spheres (Papacharissi, 2004, p. 11-13), but the users themselves should be active participants. For example, for Benkler, the internet public sphere is created of social activities that the new technologies of information and communication can enable. According to him, the major influence of the internet on the public sphere in democratic societies depends on the information and cultural

output activity of emerging 'nonmarket actors' such as individuals, NGOs, and also their feedback impact on the major mass media firms. These cultural and information activities empower 'the networked public sphere to moderate the two major concerns with commercial mass media as a platform for the public sphere: (1) the excessive power it gives its owners, and (2) its tendency, when owners do not dedicate their media to exert power, to foster an inert polity', and hence numerous actors will be able to see themselves as possible participants in public discourse and in the political scene instead of being only a passive receiver of mediated information (Benkler, 2006, p. 220).

It is true that many scholars are optimistic about the role of the internet, but some of them also have concerns. Papacharissi, as an example, is optimistic about the role of the internet and related new technologies in reviving the public sphere; however, she presents some of the negative aspects of it alongside with its hopeful potential. She believes that although the internet enables people everywhere to participate in debates, it also often fragments political discourse in addition to information access inequalities and other defects (Papacharissi, 2002, p. 9).

While in contrast, Sassi (2000, p. 95) states it might be that the internet has fragmentizing means, but in the meantime, it unites issues and creates a lot of new public spheres that may share and revolve around the same issues through the World Wide Web. She also refers to a globalization advantage for the people asserting that even if people fragmented because of the internet, they can be global: extending and reaching to everywhere in the world. Another point that makes the internet supportive for creating the public sphere according to her is that all types of subjects and public issues either local or global can be found and discussed on the net.

Another important advantage of the internet and other information and communication new technologies is helping individuals and groups in the self-organizing of their various issues (Van Dijk, 2000, p. 36). Through the direct use of communication new technologies people have the opportunity to address governmental and political bodies directly and they can do even more to the extent that they can make their own political network (Van Dijk, 2000, p. 36). Therefore, the internet, which allows people to collaborate and share information, provides a better forum for the formation of the public sphere where an actual democratic form of political discussion could take place (Roberts, 2009). In the same way, Bowen 1996

(cited in Papacharissi, 2004, p. 13) argues that the internet grants many channels for political expression and many ways to affect politics. The hopes of internet benefits for promoting the public sphere also depend on the fact that it provides a space for personal expression, enabling unknown persons and groups to communicate with other people directly and to participate in reconfiguring public concerns, and bridges the state institutions with the people (Papacharissi, 2002, p. 13-14). Equally important, interactivity, which is one of the internet's significant characteristics, enhances user's participation through enabling instant polling, surveys and voting from home, in addition to empowering them to comment and show their opinions on various issues. It is also valuable to note that obtaining and spreading political communication through the internet is inexpensive, fast, easy and convenient, and the information that is available on the internet is usually unmediated (Papacharissi, 2002, p. 14).

Some criticism of the optimistic expectations of the democratizing effects of the internet, lies in the inequality of accessing it and therefore it is claimed that it cannot promptly ensure a fair, democratic, representative and equitable public sphere. For this reason, critics such as Frederick Williams and John Pavlik in their work *the people's right to know: media, democracy, and the Information highway*, suggest that the access to information and communication technology should be equal and universal in affordable rates. In addition, there should be a real commitment to the online expression; otherwise, the internet as a medium of public sphere only 'harbours an illusion of openness' (Papacharissi, 2002, p. 14).

Overall, Benkler (2006, p. 233-237) has outlined the main criticisms of the early claims about the democratizing influences of the internet with several basic points. One of these criticisms is Information overload, which means when everyone talks, there will be numerous statements and information and this leads to the problem of attention fragmentation. Hence, too many opinions and observations complicate the problem of shifting through them even more, and this by turn leads to an unmanageable din. The second criticism of the democratizing impact of the internet according to Benkler, is centralization. It is argued that the majority of internet users tend to focus only on a small number of the top websites, while numerous websites do not have any visitors. This has raised concerns that the internet may copy the mass media model of centralization. Another criticism undermines the role of individuals and groups of volunteers' debates and discussions through the internet in performing

watchdog duty and making an influence on society as the powerful mass media outlets do. Proponents of this criticism believe that in modern complex societies, only powerful mass media that are supported economically and politically can perform the Fourth Estate function. Moreover, there are arguments about the digital divide, considered another defect of the internet's potential according to some critics. It is believed that participation in the public sphere is skewed mainly to those who are wealthy and skilled in society.

Nevertheless, Benkler responds to these claims and to show that the internet can be more effective in helping liberal public spheres than traditional media, he provides many defences. For instance, he first of all emphasizes that the democratizing impact of the internet 'must be compared to democracy in the context of mass media, not in the context of an idealized utopia' (Benkler, 2006, p. 237). He then refers to the fact that computers and internet services are proliferated and becoming affordable and accessible almost everywhere, especially among underrepresented groups in developed countries. Benkler further states that computer literacy and skills are much more broadly 'distributed than the skills and instruments of mass-media production' (Benkler, 2006, p. 237). Consequently, the digital divide has become less and it seems to be a transitional problem, and participation of networked public sphere is not skewed only to the wealthy and skilled people. For the claims of fragmentation of discourse and attention, since most of the audiences see the same websites, Benkler states that this by itself resolves the fragmentation problem because only when each user reads a customized and different website, will lead to more fragmentation and not when the vast majority of internet users see the same websites. He further argues that the polarization problem is also solved because 'the highly visible sites are not small-group interactions with homogeneous viewpoints' (Benkler, 2006, p. 238).

In terms of emerging countries such as the Kurdish society, where so far ordinary citizens seek to have an outlet for expression and participation in debating about common issues after a long period of deprivation, and where the majority of mass media outlets are dominated by the political parties; the internet is considered as a key tool for people to say their words on many issues. For example, Eñmed Reşîd Mîre editor-in-chief of *Lvîn* magazine and *Lvinpress.com*, argues that the Kurdish society suffers from illiteracy, which may reduce the internet's influence, he believes that for

Kurdish citizens, the internet is the medium that enables them to express their opinions:

In general, in our society, people have suffered from a lack of mediums to express themselves, therefore, now they can find themselves on these websites and writing whatever they want, which makes them feel the existence of their personality (Appendix 6.1).

It is true that not all of the Kurdish people have the same opportunity in using the internet because of a lack of skills, illiteracy and poor infrastructure of internet services, but at least it is popular among the young who are active on the web especially in the major cities. In this context, Khaled Sulaiman, who is a journalist and media lead trainer, explains that among young people the internet and other new information and communication technologies are too popular and influential. He further comments:

This has made communication in the big cities more influential and powerful. Besides, in the big cities online journalism has had an influence on public opinion. To illustrate, many times when there will be a demonstration, a rally or a seminar, the organizers publish announcements or send invitations to people to attend and participate in these events (Appendix 6.8).

In the same way, Şwan Muḥemed, AFP correspondent and director of the Spee Company for media training, which publishes Spee magazine and operates speemedia online news site (speemedia.com), points out that most of the internet users in the Kurdistan region are young people who benefited from it significantly to present themselves and to participate in debates:

According to my information, among 4.75 Million of the Kurdistan region's population, almost half a million are using the internet and the vast majority of them are youths, while the adults and elders may use the internet once or twice per week. Therefore, this will have a significant impact on the freedom of speech, diversity of opinions and debating (Appendix 6.12).

Dana Es'ed also believes that the internet has offered people the opportunity to participate actively in public debates:

Online journalism has provided a considerable space for people to contribute in debating about common and public issues. Because of online journalism, today the audiences not only receive but they contribute in creating news and providing opinions. People in Kurdistan interact with online journalism through commenting, writing their

opinions and criticizing reports and articles that post on the online news sites (Appendix 6.2).

By her turn, Nyaz 'Ebdulla reporter and program presenter at Radio Newa, despite asserting the significance of the internet, she points out that still the infrastructure of internet services in rural areas in the Kurdistan region is poor, which means a wide range of people do not have access to it. In Nyaz's words:

In terms of online journalism, it is true that it is effective and has a high proportion of the audiences, though the internet service is still confined to the cities and we cannot say that all of the people have benefited from it as required (Appendix 6.9).

The internet has empowered users to speak and express their opinions showing their attitudes towards many sensitive and significant public issues, whereas this was not possible prior to the internet expansion in Kurdish society. In general, despite the fact that in the Kurdistan region internet services are mainly confined to the major cities that have a high proportion of the population, Kurdish journalists and academics believe that the internet has become the medium where people can discuss and debate about many issues. They refer to social networking websites and online news sites, as supportive forums for the people so they can participate in debates and express their opinions freely. For example, Kemal Reuf director of Shar (city) Company, which publishes Shar magazine and operates Sharpres news website (Sharpres.net), comments on this aspect:

I believe that the social networking websites have created a circle and have made the youths in our country read and write comments and texts on these websites, which has made a sort of contribution to them (Appendix 6.7).

Serdar Muħemed editor-in-chief of *Awêne* newspaper takes a similar line to Kemal Reuf as follows:

The social networking websites have had significant effects. For example, previously it was difficult for people to publish their views and opinions, whereas now, because of social networking websites, all people can easily and quickly post footages, photos and texts and to express their opinion. They provide great opportunities for freedom of speech and even for revealing events (Appendix 6.11).

Moreover, according to Eħmed Reşîd Mîre, online journalism makes audiences feel that they own the websites since they are allowed to express their opinions:

I believe one of the positive points of online journalism is that when the audiences browse a website, they feel that they are the owner because they are able to express their opinion on the website (Appendix 6.1).

Similarly, Şwan Muñemed emphasizes that social networking websites have enabled ordinary citizens in the Kurdistan region to participate in discussing various issues and adds:

If in the past only a group of the intellectuals and journalists were able to criticize and show notices about the political and ruling system and the officials, now because of these social networking websites, all citizens spread their criticisms, notices and suggestions about various issues. Therefore, through these social networking websites, daily we can see the production of public opinion on a particular subject. To illustrate, currently there is a kind of consensus about the pensions of parliament members and other senior officials (Appendix 6.12).

In the same way, Hiwa Osman, Blogger, media developer and consultant, director of Mediawan foundation for media training, agrees that the internet has offered more space for debating to the people than the traditional mass media has done:

I believe online journalism has had a role in expanding the space of debating for more people while traditional media is limited in terms of time and space... the online sites may have hundreds of thousands of audiences and have no space problem, thus they have created a broader space of debate among the people (Appendix 6.6)

From this evidence, we can understand that in the Kurdish region, although a large portion of society has no access to the internet because of the poor infrastructure and illiteracy especially outside the major cities, it still represents the medium for numerous users to participate in the debates and express their opinion. As Benkler stresses that the democratizing impact of the internet must be compared to democracy only in the context of mass media and not in the context of an idealized utopia, for the Kurdish case this means that the internet influences freedom of speech, public sphere and democracy much better than the traditional mass media. Perhaps some of the criticisms that have been raised about the democratizing influences of the internet in developed countries can be applied to Kurdish society such as the digital divide, because still barriers such as illiteracy, lack of skills and internet access pose problems that make the networked public sphere to be skewed mainly to the literate, skilled people and those who live in major cities. Whereas in terms of fragmentation of discourse and attention, it is valuable to note that it is true that there are numerous Kurdish websites, though only some of them have the vast majority of the audiences.

For example, according to *Alexa.com* some of the Kurdish online news sites are the most viewed among all websites in Iraq. This means most of the internet users see and read almost the same issues and subjects that are published on these websites, which according to Benkler reduces the fragmentation of attention or discourse. On the other hand, since there are some barriers to people accessing the internet as mentioned earlier, this means a large portion of citizens cannot talk and say their words on the internet. Therefore, the claim of 'information overloaded' perhaps cannot be applied to Kurdish society and even if so, it may not have reached the level that leads to unmanageable din.

6.6 The public sphere and Kurdish society

In general, sources of emerging public spheres and its mediums in developing societies are to some extent different from that in European countries. The public sphere, for example, in stateless communities and other regions that have strong tribal traditions, is created to a certain level through tribal gatherings with almost similar purposes and roles as of the European people's assemblies in the past centuries, where the participants discuss and exchange opinions on subjects of common interests to their tribe and community. Such places are still effective for the public in rural areas in such communities, since the high proportion of illiteracy was and is still considered one of their most prominent difficulties (CommGap 2009, p. 2; Odugbemi, 2008, p. 27). The Kurdish society that suffered from high illiteracy and was characterized by tribalism until recently, has had places where citizens assembled prior to the evolution of mass media. For example, *dîwan* (assemblies), which was the place where the Kurdish tribal chiefs and notables gathered, were places for discussing subjects of common interest to their villages and tribes. Moreover, prior to the proliferation of television and an electricity supply in the Kurdish villages which did not happen until the late twentieth century, ordinary citizens gathered together at the house of a notable or the most important man in the village for entertainment and exchanging information and opinions. According to Allison (1996) in these indoor assemblies, which were usually during winter evenings, the men of the village gathered to discuss and gossip:

Before the advent of television, singing and storytelling were an important part of local entertainment. Winter evenings were the most popular time for this, when people were gathered together indoors for warmth, during the summer months, work kept people outdoors with

less time for relaxation. Men would often gather at the guest-house of the most important man in the village to exchange information and gossip; songs and stories were often told. Women also performed, but many felt ashamed to do so in the presence of men; often they sang songs for each other and their children (Allison, 1996, p. 33).

Nevertheless, while Habermas's descriptive conception of the public sphere deals with the historical development of the public sphere as a phenomenon founded in the bourgeois societies of European countries, it is difficult for such a notion to fit with Kurdish society, which, as the following section explains, has not had such a history of public spheres and was not bourgeois society. Therefore, to evaluate and analyse the public sphere in such society, it is important to apply the normative model, which deals with the principles, elements and values and explains what infrastructures of political and social life are required for an ideal public sphere. This is important to show what elements exist in this society that meet with the normative values of Habermas' notion.

Until the late twentieth century, the public sphere in Iraqi Kurdistan was dominated by men and Kurdish women were excluded from the public sphere to a large extent. They may have had some gatherings in some places, but in general because of societies' many barriers to women; they have not had a notable contribution in the public sphere. Nevertheless, in the last two decades, women became active in public events and they have had more presence in many issues such as their rights, national issues and many others through feminist organizations, mass media and demonstrations. For instance, Çnar Se'd 'Ebdulla, a former minister of the KRG, believes that Kurdistan is witnessing a significant number of women in the public sphere (Rudaw, 2013).

It should also be noted that during the Ba'athist era in Iraq, Saddam Hussein the dictator of the country, resorted to the use of a whole range of advanced and systematic means to control the public sphere such as a severe public surveillance, propaganda and forcing the people to follow his leadership. All of the mass media outlets were strictly controlled by the state, public places were all subjected to the state's severe surveillance and the unions and organizations were either completely loyal to the Ba'ath Party or part of it. As such, people were not allowed to participate in any debate publicly and they only had some space for private interaction in their private lives (Gokpinar, 2013).

In Kurdish society, the mosques are/were another traditional place for people to gather, especially during Friday prayers, where most of the men in the village were attending. The Imam (a leader of congregational prayer in a mosque) gives a *Xutbe* 'sermon' usually about a social, national subject or any other subject from the perspective of the Islamic religion. These sermons often affect the attendees; however, no one can participate during these sermons and all of the attendees are listeners, but after the completion of the prayers, some of them gather in small groups discussing and debating about some issues. These gatherings, in addition to the sermons, usually leave an impact on the people leading sometimes to a sort of public opinion. This is not only in the villages, but also in the cities and towns where larger numbers of people attend these prayers. The mosques were and remain an important place for debating about many common concerns and subjects for the Muslims in the Kurdish society with a religious perspective. Nevertheless, a religious exclusion also existed in Kurdish society. To illustrate, in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, in addition to Muslims, there are Christians, Êzîdî (Yazidis) and other religious minorities. Each of these religious minorities has their own church or temple and even mass media outlets; however, their participation in debates about public issues in the region is very limited, because overall such debates are dominated by the Muslim majority.

In the major cities and towns, beside the mosques, teahouses 'Çayxane' were and still are another place for debating and discussions. There are many popular teahouses in the cities where people, including ordinary citizens, intellectuals, artists and even politicians and officials gather and they usually debate and discuss subjects of common interest. For example, *Şe'b* (people) teahouse in Sulaymaniyah city (see figure 13) and *Meçko* teahouse in Erbil are the most popular teahouses in these two cities where various classes of people gather to relax, discuss and debate about many issues from political, social, to economics, arts, and other issues. In the same way, other civil society bodies are effective in Kurdish society. Many civil society bodies, including non-governmental (NGO) associations and organizations, unions and movements, educational and professional bodies seek to achieve consensus and to create public opinion on many common subjects relying mainly on mass media and communication means. For example, feminist associations are the most prominent civil society bodies, which have played a crucial role in creating a consensus about women's rights such as fighting against illiteracy, female circumcision and many others. In the meantime,

many mass media outlets such as TVs and radio stations have provided the opportunity for some groups or individuals through talk show programs to discuss and debate about various issues concerning the public, which in some cases and to an extent may affect the decision-making institutions. However, the governmental institutions have not reconfigured to support the demands of civil society bodies as required; therefore, often the public spheres do not achieve their goals in affecting the state's various institutions.



Figure 13: Şe'b (people) teahouse in Sulaymaniyah city
Source: kurdistania.tumblr.com

In fact, although citizens and civil society bodies seek to make use of any medium for their participations in discussions about common issues, especially through talk show programs on TV and radio, the problem is that not everyone has a chance to be represented in these programs. Besides, as the Kurdish society is an emerging democracy, most of the mass media channels are dominated by the political parties, which by in turn work on dominating the public spheres for their own favour. Therefore, what the majority resort to in Kurdish society nowadays to express their opinions and to participate in discussing issues of common interest are mainly the websites consisting of online news sites, social networking websites and others; though, this also does not mean that all citizens can participate. It is true that the internet has a considerable number of users because of the proliferation of communication and mass media new technologies to an extent, but this is confined mainly to the major cities and so far, there are problems of illiteracy, accessing it, lack

of skills and other barriers that limit the participation to all of the people. This means that access is not guaranteed to all citizens as Habermas's normative model emphasizes as a condition of forming a public sphere. However, compared to traditional mass media, the internet supported by its characteristics has empowered its users to say their words and participate in public debates. Again, according to Kurdish journalists and academics, the internet including online journalism and social networking websites, is a significant tool for forming public opinion through enabling users to participate in public discussions. In this context, Hiwa Osman, states:

Compared to the traditional media, in general all online media types have helped in creating more rational and clear public opinion. The online news sites such as NRT, *Awêne* and Hawlatî have recently connected their space of commenting to the Facebook, where people can comment on their topics. Nowadays, through online media, people have much more sources; they are capable of commenting and writing about any common issues, which may be read by a large number of people. Besides, through online media, all people have access to know what is going on and they know where to look for any subject. Today online media has democratized the information in the Kurdistan region (Appendix 6.6).

He further states that social networking websites are very effective in forming the public sphere:

The social networking websites are the most effective in creating the public sphere and public opinion because they are completely free and there is no censor on them (Appendix 6.6).

Nyaz 'Ebdulla, another Kurdish journalist, also believes that the internet has empowered the Kurdish people to affect the decision-making centres through their participation:

Online journalism has been able to play a role in the decision-making process. The people follow up the subjects on the online news sites and they express their opinions, and this eventually makes a sort of social and ideological debate, which I believe will influence the decisions (Appendix 6.9).

It seems that the internet as supported by its unique feature is the most appropriate medium for citizens in the Kurdish emerging democracy because to an extent it meets some of the normative principles of the public sphere especially access, debate over public interest, expressing opinions and responding to each other. Besides, while it reduces or eliminates the roles of mass media owners and editors, in the meantime it offers users a greater role in publishing (Benkler, 2006, p. 271). It is true that this

medium also has shortcomings particularly concerning inequality of access because of the many barriers that are mentioned earlier in this section. But as Benkler (2006) stresses, democratizing the impact of the internet must be compared in the context of democracy of the mass media and not as idealized utopia, therefore, compared to the mass media outlets, the internet represents a much better medium for public spheres and democracy.

Nevertheless, in such society, another problem is not supporting the demands of the public spheres. As Habermas believes, in societies that have an authoritarian culture and system, the institutions of the state are not designed to support the needs and demands of civil society organizations (Maia, 2007, p. 92). Similarly, the societies with the authoritarian past that inherited a profound legacy of repressive tradition and culture, including Iraqi Kurdistan society, have almost similar problems because the state institutions and departments are not reconfigured to support the demands and opinions that emerge from the public spheres of mass media or various other civil society bodies, as required.

6.7 Conclusion

This chapter developed knowledge of how the internet has become a better medium than traditional mainstream mass media for the people in the Kurdistan region for participating in various debates about common issues and subjects. It has showed that the evolution of the internet with its unique features that allows easy access and use, communicating and interaction on many levels, raised hopes among many scholars to become a proper tool for creating and enhancing the public sphere. It has become a significant tool for communication and media where all actors from political movements to different cultures, ethnic groups and so on in the world want to exploit it for their own favours and agendas. Thus it is at the forefront of the evolving public sphere (Dahlgern, 2006, p. 106), and has become the key medium for politics and this will more and more be so in the future (Kahn and Kellner, 2006, P. 720). However, as this chapter has shown, since the internet also has some barriers, it cannot be the ideal medium for the democratic public sphere and freedom of speech, but when it is compared to traditional mass media, the former is considered supportive to expand the possibilities for the vast majority of people to participate and debate much freer and easier. The internet not only provides avenues of discourse around the

bottlenecks of traditional mass media outlets, whether these are held by authoritarian regimes or by media owners, but it also restructures public discourse in a way that provides individuals a greater say in their governance than the mass media made possible (Benkler, 2006, p. 271).

To conclude, the internet underpinned by its characteristics, remains as the key tool for people in the Kurdistan region to have participation in debates about many common issues, since the vast majority of mass media outlets are owned and dominated by the political parties, which has made it difficult for ordinary citizens' opinions to be presented in these outlets. Also, in Kurdish society, the internet is not the perfect medium for producing a public sphere, especially because of access problems that may reduce equal opportunity to everyone, though this does not undermine the involvement of a big fraction of society in a networked public debate through various websites that leads to emerging and transforming the public spheres. As the chapter has shown, the characteristics that make the internet a better medium than mass media are many, but the most important is anonymity, interactivity, affordability and users great ability in publishing. It should also be noted that for promoting freedom of expression as an essential principle of the public sphere, internet users should be active and this in turn needs a democratic public free from any censorship. According to (Sunstein 2007) the system of freedom of speech needs more than only avoiding censorship and it has to do more such as guaranteeing people's exposure to competing perspectives. In the meantime, freedom of expression, interactivity and mass participation as the most important normative conditions of the public sphere must be protected by technological design, by administrative and legislative regulation of technology and through the more traditional method of judicial creation and recognition of constitutional rights (Balkin, 2004, P. 6).

Chapter 7: Online journalism in The Kurdistan region

7.1 Introduction

To understand the development and importance of online journalism in the Kurdistan region, it is necessary to examine its key features and the most common barriers that affect this style of media. This chapter also provides a full understanding of the notion of online journalism and its characteristics, types and benefits, which in turn will contribute to a better understanding of the development of online journalism in the Kurdistan region.

Online journalism, also known as digital journalism, is a contemporary method of journalism that emerged noticeably in the 1990s when the World Wide Web was created. It is claimed that this form of journalism has brought significant changes to the mass media sector where all editorial content has moved to the Internet. Even the traditional media channels have resorted to going online to be more widespread. According to Internet Live Stats (2014) by September 2014 the Internet had almost 3 billion users. This evolution of the Internet and its accessibility in the world has helped in the growth of online journalism and has affected political, social, economic, human rights, cultural, scientific, beliefs and many other fields and aspects of our life. The Internet has also helped in spreading information across a broader range of people and has more effectively connected people, as Wang (2007, p. 4) states:

The Internet does allow various people regardless of their gender, ethnicity, and social economic status to post their opinions on a series of political, economic and social issues.

It is argued that the Internet has changed journalism in three directions. First, it has enabled journalists to become an 'intermediary force' in democracy. Second, it has provided a wide range of resources and unlimited technological potential, and finally it has created its own style of journalism on the World Wide Web called online journalism (Bardoel and Deuze, 2001, p. 1). Consequently, numerous online news sites have been founded, while the majority of printed and broadcasted media outlets have resorted to having an online version to maintain a presence on the web. Many journalists, in addition to ordinary citizens, have established their own forums and websites. Thus, the World Wide Web has become a fertile ground for journalism (Bradshaw and Rohumaa, 2011; Gillmor, 2006; Beyers, 2005).

The Kurdistan region as an emergent democracy, like elsewhere in the world, has witnessed this evolution of online journalism; however, many problems and barriers still hinder this type of media. Therefore, this chapter provides an analysis of online journalism in the Kurdistan region in terms of its features, types, services and ownership. Besides, it describes the independent media in the Kurdistan region and explains the most common barriers that face online journalism through the perspectives of the journalists working in this field and media academics and trainers also experienced in this field. But, before that, this chapter addresses the concept, characteristics and different types of online journalism websites.

7.2 Online journalism: concept, characteristics and types

Online journalism is considered the fourth type of journalism, next to printed media (newspapers and magazines), television and radio (Bardoel and Deuze, 2001). This concept refers to content accessible via the World Wide Web (Singer, 2007, p. 28). It means writing, reporting and publishing various journalistic works for and through the World Wide Web on the Internet. Many scholars have also defined online journalism, for example, Deuze (2003, P. 206) states that online journalism is producing journalistic material exclusively for sites on the World Wide Web. Similarly, Wolk (2001) defines online journalism as 'quality news and information' that spreads through the World Wide Web in which audiences are able at the same time to read, see and listen through computers and other media/communication technologies connected to the Internet. In the same way, the 'Networked Publics' team from the University of Southern California defines online journalism as the process of producing and posting news contents by real journalists who works for "mainstream market driven news organizations" through the Web (Networked Publics, 2006). On the other hand, Allan (2006, p. 105), states that online journalism "brings to bear alternative perspectives, context and ideological diversity to its reporting" and provides the audience the medium to hear various voices from around the world. Based on the descriptions provided by scholars, the researcher has concluded a common definition to online journalism, as follows:

Online journalism is the process of posting news and other journalistic materials that have been produced by real journalists through the Web, in various formats such as texts, images, footage and graphics.

Basically, online journalism has many characteristics such as hypertext, multimedia, immediacy, interactivity, unlimited space, real-time, non-linear story-telling, accessibility, permanency, global distribution and customisation, personalisation and others (Bradshaw and Rohumaa, 2011, p. 30-31; Fenton, 2010; Redden and Witschge, 2010; Greer, 2006; Beyers, 2005; Kawamoto 2003; Bardoel and Deuze, 2001; Pavlik, 2001; Landow, 1992), but the most distinct features that differentiates it from other types of media are: multimediality, hypertextuality and interactivity (Domingo, 2006; Deuze, 2003).

1- Multimediality: One of the most significant features of the Web is multimediality, which offers news and information in many formats at the same time. This potential of the Internet has transformed the way in which stories can be published (Friend and Singer 2007). Multimedia in online journalism can be understood as the combination of content provided in various formats such as text, video, image, maps, charts, animation and so on and produced in various units of one or more media bodies (Veglis, 2012, p. 219; Siapera and Veglis, 2012, p. 34; Quinn and Filak, 2005, p. 70; Deuze 2003, p. 212; Hall, 2001, p. 42; De Wolk, 2001). Similarly, it can be described as the use of more than one type of media in a single product (Kawamoto, 2003, p.4). For example, a report on the web may consist at the same time of the text, photo, footage and/or an audio clip.

2- Hypertextuality: This is another essence characteristic of the Web's structure. The non-linear structure of the web offers users the chance to navigate through various materials on the same or other websites (Bradshaw and Rohumaa, 2011, p. 37). Through hyperlinks, connections or linking between various news stories through the web, related information or other content on the same website, or any other website, is easy and this allows users to obtain thorough information and find out more about the historical background of news and events (Gunter, 2003, p. 69; Hall, 2001, p. 67; Landow, 1992, cited in Domingo 2006, 67). This means an online site can have many separate pages linked to each other, while each can be read separately (Ward, 2002, p. 22).

3- Interactivity: Interactivity is another distinctive feature of online journalism and it can be said that it is the most effective feature that empowers audiences to participate with and to communicate with journalists (Bates et al., 1997). This allows media bodies and their editors to receive feedback from audiences and this enables them to make

corrections or necessary adaptations to better satisfy the needs of users (Veglis, 2012, p. 219). Liu and Shrum (2002, p. 54) define interactivity as the “degree to which two or more communication parties can act on each other, in the communication medium, and on the messages and the degree to which such influences are synchronized”. Generally, scholars explain that interactivity between Internet users can happen on many levels, such as one to one, one to many, many to many, and from many to one (Gunter, 2003, p. 7; Ward, 2002, p.144-148; Schultz, 1999). Therefore, it is believed that the Web has granted a broad space for interaction among its users. Gunter (2003, p. 70), further states that the Internet provides opportunity for communication among users on all levels with the ability to reply. In terms of the tools for interactivity on websites, scholars refer to different types such as email, online forums, comments, polls and social networking websites (Friend and Singer, 2007; Schultz, 2000).

Due to the development and popularity of journalistic work on the web, various types of online journalism websites have been founded by different parties or individuals. The common principle of any of these types is publishing journalistic products and enabling any user to participate either in media production or in debates about various subjects. Mark Deuze (2003) categorised online journalism into four widespread types: mainstream news sites, index and category sites, meta- and comment sites and share and discussion sites. **Mainstream news sites** are considered the most widespread type of journalism websites in which they provide editorial materials and participatory communication whether moderated or filtered (Deuze, 2003, p. 208; Schultz, 1999). According to Siapera (2012, p. 167) these websites post material created by professional editors, publishers and journalists as part of their work and get paid to do so. She further explains that their news is produced either by reporters, bought from news agencies or ordered because of the high value, allowing readers in the meantime to comment on the news stories, opinion articles and other journalistic materials. In other words, the material on these websites is originally produced for the web or aggregated from other sources of media:

This type of news site does not differ much from print or broadcasting journalism in its approach to journalistic storytelling, news values, and relationships with audiences (Deuze, 2003, p. 208).

This type of online journalism includes websites belonging to TV stations such as CNN, BBC, NBC news, Fox News, Sky News, and many other similar websites, in addition to

online newspapers such as The Guardian, The New York Times, The Washington Post and many others. It also includes many 'Net-native' news sources outside of mainstream media (Deuze, 2003, p. 208). This type of online journalism maintains the classic position of audiences, i.e. consuming journalism but while being offered public services and a space to comment. It also reproduces the offline style of journalism:

This form of journalism reproduces the offline model, and while integrating some new media features, it does not really significantly alter offline journalism – from this point of view, this kind of journalism may not be considered a new form as such, but rather the successful migration of journalism to the Internet (Siapera, 2012, P. 168).

Mainstream news sites, which are good supporters of liberal representative democracy, are often considered as an accurate source on a wide range of subjects for interested audiences who also have the opportunity to comment on some of their articles. Shanahan (2010, p. 1) points out that the read-write potential of the web, particularly the comment spaces provided by news sites and blogs, enable participation and allow individuals, regardless of their skills, to engage in two-way communication to a great and immediate extent, either anonymously or identified. News websites, despite a broad variety of services from archives to games, spaces and mediums for interaction, have been provided for debating about main and local news stories (Hall, 2001, p. 38). As such, the audiences' comments constitute a space for public discussion and exchanging ideas (Da Silva, 2013, p. 176).

Index and category sites. This is another type of online journalism website, not associated with mainstream media bodies, but mainly attributed to search engines such as Yahoo, Google, Bing and others (Deuze, 2003, p. 209). These websites are based on the collecting and aggregating of news and other journalistic materials from other news outlets. The main process used in these websites is reproducing rather than producing news and journalistic materials (Siapera, 2012, p. 166). Through these websites, journalists and ordinary citizens can obtain deep links to many news stories and other journalistic materials from all over the world, which according to Siapera (2012, p. 166), mainly includes top news stories ranked on the basis of popularity. They also offer users the option of customising the website on the basis of types of news such as sport, politics, entertainment and/or according to the news from a specific geographic place, and/or in terms of the most interesting news outlets, such as BBC news, CNN, Sky news and so on (Siapera, 2012).

Meta- and comment sites, which often include news about media and media issues in general, sometimes play the role of watchdog on media. According to Deuze (2003, p. 210) this type is about journalism and media production. It is the process of discussing editorial content published elsewhere on the web or even in other media outlets. Deuze (2003, p. 210) believes that throughout the world many websites such as Freedomforum, Mediachannel, Poynter and others play this role and function of a type of online journalism, in terms of “media criticism or alternative media voices”.

The fourth type of online journalism for Deuze entails **share and discussion sites**. Since the Internet is a communication infrastructure, online journalism uses this feature of the Internet to facilitate and enable platforms for users to exchange ideas and stories revolving around various local or global subjects and many times concentrate on a particular subject, for example universal anti-globalisation (Independent Media Centers ‘Indymedia’), or new technology. This type is also referred to as a ‘weblogs’ group because it provides personal accounts of users regarding their experiences (Lasica, 2001).

7.3 Blogs

Weblogs or Blogs developed and grew in popularity in the late 1990s. They are an interactive and direct tool of self-expression and participatory journalism through enabling the public to have a voice on the Internet through free websites, such as Blogger.com, Blog.com, Wordpress.com, Webs.com and others. These websites, alongside social media websites, allow all individuals to build their own and personal websites without the need to learn programming languages. They can post their opinions on local or national issues, personal events or any content they want (Hill and Lashmar, 2014, p. 162; Quinn and Filak, 2005, p. 76; Gunter, 2003, P. 14). Hill et al. (2014, P.8) describe blogs as follows:

Blogs (or web logs) are periodically updated sites managed by an individual or group to provide information or opinion on a range of topics. Entries, or posts, are organized so that the most recent entry appears at the top. Many blogs allow and invite discussion from readers in the form of comments directly on the site. In popular blogs, the discussion via comments can contain more varied information and opinion than the original blog post itself. Blogs vary in length, frequency of post, topic, and formality. Because of the advent of free and easy-to-use web publishing tools (e.g., Blogger, WordPress, and Tumblr), blogs

are available and used as an outlet for those with a wide range of resources and proficiency with computing.

Blogs also allow followers to leave comments below the posts and this makes blogs a proper forum for debate and dialogue about many common issues, enabling audiences to follow up actively (Veglis, 2012, p. 213; Domingo and Heinonen, 2008, p. 5-6). The debates usually extend to other blogs and “bloggers can comment on other weblog posts in their own blogs, and use a trackback tool to inform about their comments in the original post, with a link to their weblog” (Domingo and Heinonen, 2008, p. 6). This leads to the formation of a community of bloggers who participate in commenting and discussing (Domingo and Heinonen, 2008, p. 6). The creation of this virtual public sphere brings people together regardless of their gender, ethnicity, religion or beliefs where they can participate freely in common debates (see Chapter 6).

This form of web page enables Internet users to be publishers with a worldwide spread. They are usually simple web pages that post short paragraphs of opinions, information or personal diaries, written by individuals who try to maintain an online presence (Hill and Lashmar, 2014, p. 161; Lietsala and Sirkkunen (2008, p. 31; Stefanac, 2007, p. 45; Andersen, 2007, p. 7; Allan, 2006, p. 44). This simplicity is also considered one of the main advantages of the blog (Bradshaw and Rohumaa, 2011, p. 130). Moreover, blogs often link to other online materials and usually refer to other blogs for sharing information and commentary (Allan, 2006, p. 46; Gillmor, 2004, p. 29; Deuze, 2003, p. 209), and their content is generally displayed in reverse chronological order with the most recent on the top. No journalistic standards are used in ordering the posts by relevance (Veglis, 2012, p. 213; Domingo and Heinonen, 2008, p. 5). Additionally, it is very simple to create/use a blog, they are relatively inexpensive and they are able to reach large numbers of people rapidly. For example, Back to Iraq (www.back-to-iraq.com), Baghdad Burning (riverbendblog.blogspot.co.uk), UP Global (blog.up.co) are blogs created by journalists that publish opinions, news and information on many subjects (Shang, Jin and Zhang, Hao, 2012, p. 479-491). Jesse James Garrett, content editor for Ingram Micro’s website and editor of jjg.net blog, describes blogs as follows:

Personal platforms through which individuals broadcast their perspectives on current events, the media, our culture, and basically anything else that strikes their fancy from the vast sea of raw material available out there on the Web. Some are more topic-focused than

others, but all are really built around someone's personal interests. Neither a faceless news-gathering organization nor an impersonal clipping service, a quality weblog is distinguished by the voice of its editor, and that editor's connection with his or her audiences (Cited in Katz, 2002, p. 21-22).

On the other hand, Lietsala and Sirkkunen (2008, p. 31) identify the main characteristics of a blog with the following points:

- 1- Authorial voice: blogs tend to be written in a personal, conversational style. They are usually the work of an identified author or group of authors.
- 2- Links and track backs: the services make it very easy to insert links to other websites, usually as a reference to an article or blog post, or to provide further information.
- 3- Comments: each blog post has a comments section, which effectively acts a message board for the article.
- 4- Subscription: blogs can be subscribed to, usually via RSS technology. Blogs can be created quickly and easily using any of a number of services.

It is argued that many reasons lie behind the use of blogs by individuals and groups. Bradshaw and Rohumaa (2011, p. 77-78), for example, identify several reasons for blogging, such as for editorial, commercial and professional purposes. In terms of editorial reasons, it is believed that journalists can find new ways to source leads through blogging. Besides, blogs provide a faster method of publishing than other media outlets do, offer further space for exploring stories, and act as a platform for other media links and content. In terms of commerciality, blogs are able to improve the visibility of news organisations on search engines such as Yahoo, Google and others, in addition to improving the distribution of news stories on the web, because a successful blog attempts to work within a broader community and interact with other blog posts. In terms of the professional aspect, blogs help people to be visible and enable them to present their abilities to others, especially employers, and they can be used as a useful networking tool in the community for journalists, as well as other people looking for work.

Concerning styles and topics, a blog could be a running commentary on existing events in a particular field, it could be a series of personal reflections, political reporting and commentary, or it could take the form of pointers to other people's

materials and works (Gillmor, 2004, p. 29). Moreover, Deuze (2003, p. 209) states that these kinds of web pages can be classified as personal journalism situated somewhere between index and comment websites, since they provide limited participatory communication.

Blogs are not exclusive to journalists as ordinary citizens can create their own blogs for the purposes mentioned above, therefore this type of website lies parallel with citizen's journalism. In this regard, Siapera (2012, p. 163-164) for example, believes that blogging lies parallel with a form of civic or participatory journalism, because it makes use of audiences' contributions. Furthermore, from the democratic perspective, scholars such as Hill and Lashmar (2014) and Jay Rosen (cited in Gillmor, 2004, p. 29) believe that blogs are an "extremely democratic form of journalism" and are used by democracy advocates in these countries where mainstream media outlets are controlled.

7.4 Forums and email listing

Online forums are another place on the web where participants can discuss and comment on particular topics posted on the site. An online forum can be described as a site on the web or a part of a website that lets participants communicate with each other after they create their own account. Lanier (2011, p. 347) defines online forums as tools used by members of a specific community to communicate with each other, which often "takes the form of virtual interaction that involves posting messages to online discussion boards". These forums also reduce the fear of social isolation and stimulate participation, especially as anonymity of the participants is allowed in most online forums and commentary boxes of other websites and blogs (Correia, 2012, p. 111). The interactivity and debating characteristics of the web are essential elements of the online forum, since these forums are associated with communication tools encouraging citizens to share and/or discuss their own opinions on any subject with other users (Chae, 2009). In online forums, users usually participate to ask questions and get responses about particular subjects, and in addition to their comments, they are also allowed to create new topics, 'threads' or write replies to others about existing topics. Schultz (2000, p. 214) believes that Internet forums are arenas of discourse and expand the interactivity of the mass media generally through

broadening opportunities for audience-to-audience communication. He further argues:

Forums that are surrounded by the online environment of a mass medium have specific advantages over other online settings. One can expect that the discussions will be related to the content of the mass medium. This can ensure that people share some basic knowledge and background, and the discussions have a better chance to achieve a certain coherence (unlike chat rooms that lack defined topics). At the same time, specialists may not overwhelm forums, as is the case in many Unsent groups. Also, forums are not considered to be mere information boards, but arenas of discourse (Schultz, 2000, p. 214).

Online forums differ in terms of styles and topics. For example, many online news sites have allocated forums, commentary boxes and other tools of discussion to empower audiences to debate topics posted by these websites and to bring audiences and journalists together. This is also useful for these news websites and media bodies to find possible news story ideas and sources (Pavlik, p. 187). Even well-known, mainstream news websites can have a significant role as forums for serious discussion and useful information as professional editors run them and they often reach many more Internet users than the lesser-known bulletin boards, newsgroups or list servers (Schultz, 2000, p. 208).

Email lists, on the other hand, are a communication tool that guarantees that all subscribers get messages from the sender. Using email and creating email lists is very simple (Gillmor, 2004, p. 28), and is one of the most popular tools of communication. Dahlberg (2001, p. 624) states that this style is more acceptable than “more traditionally anarchic spaces” since the mail list is controllable as the list manager can revise the list and can direct it in order to achieve its aims and purposes of deliberative exchange (Dahlberg, 2001, p. 624). Gillmor (2004, p. 27-28) distinguishes mail lists from blogs and websites in three respects as follows:

Mail lists differ from blogs and standard web sites in at least three respects. First, they serve a specific community, the subscribers, and the community can make the list private. Second, they tend to be narrowly targeted, such as the SARS list. Third, they are “pushed” to subscribers’ email inboxes. Some are moderated; most are not. The key thing about lists is that they tend to be populated by a combination of experts in a given field or topic, and by avidly interested lay people. This can be a potent combination.

Most mail lists have small audiences but some have enormous subscribers, and from a journalism perspective, both online forums and email lists may amplify news and various journalistic materials (Gillmor, 2004, p. 28).

Da Silva and Marisa Torres (2013, p. 175-176) believe that in general the web, through its different tools of communication, has made new 'dialogical spaces' where too many common issues and public concerns can be deliberated, which help to democratise the public sphere. For example, audiences' comments and feedback in mainstream news websites constitute a space for public discussions and ideas exchanges. Online forums and other Internet tools, such as list mailings and commentary boxes, are helpful in involving the users vigorously in debating public issues of common concerns in many subjects, such as politics, education and the economy (Pavlik, 2001, p. 133).

7.5 Social media websites

There is not a single definition for social media and like other types of online journalism, many scholars have described it according to its features and/or according to their own perspectives and experiences. But, in general, this term refers to web development, in particular the invention of Web 2.0-based technologies and applications for communication, creation and sharing content. Parveen et al. (2014, p. 1) state that the (web 2.0) is dynamic and allows audiences to write and create content. Social media is also described as a group of websites and Internet-based applications on computers and other communication/information technologies that enable mass communication, interaction, discussion, creating and sharing content among Internet users (Hill et al., 2014, p. 3; Hill and Lashmar, 2014, p. 142). The most significant characteristics of social media websites are: a space for the participants to create, share and evaluate the content; they are based on interaction; each content has its own URL to be linked to external networks; and all participants have their own profile page to link to other people and content (Lietsala and Sirkkunen, 2008, P. 24). These websites have become very popular among people since they are easy to use and fast (Parveen et al., 2014, p. 1; Asur and Huberman, 2010, p. 492). They include a wide range of website types, which according to Hill and Lashmar (2014, p. 143) can be categorised into five main groups, as follows:

*Content communities: Multimedia content sites such as YouTube (video) and Flickr (photos) allow for the upload and sharing of UGC (user-generated content). In 2012, 60 hours of video was uploaded every minute to YouTube. That is one hour of video every second!

*Collaborative projects: These include text-based wikis and collaborative journalism. The most famous and largest wiki of them all is the free online encyclopaedia Wikipedia.

*Friendship community sites: These include profile-based sites such as Facebook and Google+.

*Location-based services: The GPS function on phones use satellite technology to recognise where in the world a user is located. This is used in many social media applications, mostly to allow people to find friends in their local area.

*Virtual worlds: Many multiplayer virtual games, particularly on the PlayStation games console, contain a social element where players can talk online with each other.

Whatever the type of social media website, its main feature is that it enables users to participate, communicate and create content through providing many ready to use tools such as messages and chat-boards. Of equal importance, creating communities on the basis of common interests, is another key feature of social media websites (Hill and Lashmar, 2014, p. 142-143). In fact, the essence of all social media websites is that they offer users a broad range of necessary technologies for publishing and creating content at the same time. These technologies allow users' participation in publishing and creating content on many levels. For example, they enable collaborative production such as in wikis (Bradshaw and Rohumaa, 2011, p.155), sharing and publishing various content types including texts, photos, footage and audio. In addition to social networking, such as Twitter and Facebook, social bookmarking enables rating and tagging, and syndication such as RSS feeds (Hill and Lashmar, 2014, p. 143-144; Thackeray et al., 2008, p. 339). Moreover, social media websites, which for some scholars include blogs and other forms of web 2.0 applications, are strongly linked to user-generated content (UGC), web 2.0 and to citizen journalism.

One of the most important types of social media is social networking websites (SNS) such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and Myspace. Nowadays, hundreds of millions of people have joined these social networks and integrated them with their daily life for various purposes. As Boyd and Ellison (2007, p. 210) argue, there are hundreds of SNSs with a wide range of interests and practices, and many support users to join and connect based on common political views, interests, or activities. They further state:

Some sites cater to diverse audiences, while others attract people based on common language or shared racial, sexual, religious, or nationality-based identities. Sites also vary in the extent to which they incorporate new information and communication tools, such as mobile connectivity, blogging, and photo/video-sharing (Boyd and Ellison, 2007, p.210).

Most of these social networking websites motivate interaction among the users through offering “directories of relevant user populations, opportunities for self-description and content uploads, and/or recommender systems” (Coyle and Vaughn, 2008, p. 13). These websites can be defined as services that allow individuals to perform three main activities: “(1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (Boyd and Ellison (2007, p. 211). Nevertheless, although most social networking websites share some features and tools, such as allowing users to create a profile, friends, comments and messaging, they may differ in terms of other features. For example, some of these websites allow users to upload and share photos (e.g. Flickr) or/and video footages (e.g. Facebook), while others allow instant messaging and so on (Boyd and Ellison, 2007, p. 214).

In general, those characteristics of social media (web 2.0) mentioned, represent freedom to authors, journalists and ordinary citizens, and have made this type of media more democratic than any other form of media, especially traditional outlets, since it allows all users to participate in publishing journalistic content, opinions and comments on other people’s posts (Hill and Lashmar, 2014, p.145; Quinn and Filak, 2005, p. 75). These social media websites are described as a medium for debating and discussing common issues freely. Facebook, as an example, had over 1.23 billion users by February 2014 worldwide, and has become a digital space with an interaction realm. Valtysson (2012, p.77) makes a link between Facebook and Habermas’s notion of the public sphere and states that like Habermas’s model of the public sphere, Facebook is a pre-designed space where certain interactions, motivating certain activities, communication and semiotic expression are allowed. He stresses the importance of participation of the public, a key condition for Habermas’s notion, on Facebook and also claims that this social networking website can be considered “a public sphere with users generating the communication that takes place on Facebook” (Valtysson, 2012, p.79).

7.6 Citizen journalism

Different types of online journalism websites have empowered many ordinary citizens to carry out roles that relate to professional reporters, such as a photo or video journalist's role (Hill and Lashmar, 2014, p. 143-144). These ordinary citizens, alongside professional journalists to an extent, participate in media production without having any training and this has created so-called citizen journalism (Hill and Lashmar, 2014, p. 144; Siapera, 2012, p. 170). The content of this type of journalism, which generally depends on web-2.0 applications, usually avoids journalism's traditional procedures and news gatekeepers' control of the flow of information in mainstream media. This type of journalism is mainly characterised by the coverage of events according to personal interests and views, rather than news values (Hill and Lashmar, 2014, p.145; Sapera, 2012, p. 171). Citizen journalism has been criticised by some journalists because of the poor quality of its content in general. However, Hill and Lashmar (2014, p.146) argue that it may be on social media websites that gossip replaces fact, there may be spelling and grammar mistakes also in the writing and the photos and footage may have poor quality, but most of the content has basically not been created by professionals for general consumption and to be viewed by numerous audiences, it is for friends:

They are 'private conversations' that are aimed at a few friends-the kind of gossip that is shared in pubs and bars across the land. Of course, depending on the social media site used, these 'private conversations' can be very public indeed (Hill and Lashmar, 2014, p.146).

The material of citizen journalism is exclusively produced by citizens and usually posted by themselves, but when professional journalists revise or contribute in producing this material, it becomes participatory journalism. Nevertheless, with the development and proliferation of the means that empowered ordinary citizens to participate in media production, citizen journalism now is more than only being about overcoming the boundaries of professional principles of journalism. It attempts to "overcome the limits imposed on citizenship by a certain kind of journalism conditioned by primary definers and powerful sources" (Correia, 2012, p.108). Besides, in the online environment it is very easy and cheap to create a website, blog or account on a social media website, everyone has been able to publish, which means that professional journalists are not the only party controlling the flow of media materials and they may lose their power as

gatekeepers of the news. As such, a journalist should also play the role of guiding and helping citizens to make their decisions among various types of information (Gunter, 2003, p. 166).

7.7 Online journalism in the Kurdistan region: an analysis

In the Kurdistan region, more individuals, offices and households have access to the Internet and online journalism is becoming more popular and posing a challenge to other media outlets, especially printed media (BBC, 2014). It has also affected Kurdish nationalism, culture, societal norms, consumption and other aspects, where it has created new modes of communication for the people and new spaces to express and exchange ideas and opinions (Mutlu, 2010; Farah, 2004). Besides, unlike the case of satellite television or daily newspapers in the Kurdistan region, which mainly belong to and/or are dominated by the political parties, on the Internet, smaller Kurdish groups and ordinary individuals also have a strong presence. According to Sheyholislami (2010, p. 301) non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as women activist groups, human rights groups and other bodies, in addition to ordinary citizens, operate the vast majority of websites.

Due to the relative development of the Kurdistan region, an increasing number of people have access to the Internet and websites have become popular. According to Karwan Reza, the general director of mail and communication in the Kurdistan region, 27 Internet companies provide Internet access in the region and at least 20% of the population of the region are using the Internet (PUKmedia, 2014). Nowadays, numerous websites in different areas and fields operate to serve various purposes. For example, many websites function to serve as a journalistic outlet, such as mainstream news sites, meta- and comment sites, blogs and others. Other websites function for business, educational, political, human rights, or many other purposes.

Websites in the Kurdistan region that function as journalistic tools seem to be the most popular since they have a significant number of followers. These websites are in different languages, provide various services, and operate from various countries. It appears that very few academic works have been conducted to analyse online journalism in the Kurdistan region with regard to the aspects mentioned; therefore, this section seeks to provide an analysis of online journalism in the Kurdistan region.

7.7.1 Types, ownership and identity

The websites that function as an outlet of journalism vary between the different types of online journalism, in addition to their differences in terms of their affiliation and ownership. The government (*krg.org*), the presidency (*krp.org*), parliament, ministries, ruling and opposition political parties, media foundations, civil society organisations, academic institutions, companies and various bodies have their own websites that function as news and information sources. For example, the Kurdistan parliament has its own website (*perlemanikurdistan.com*), which provides news and reports regarding the activities of its president, MPs and different committees in different languages, in addition to posting all laws that have been approved and a link for live broadcasting of parliamentary sessions etc. Parliament's website and the websites of other official institutes in the region usually focus on posting news and information that relate to their own activities; however, there are other governmental websites that function as professional news websites as well. For example, *radionawxo.org* (interior radio) is sponsored by the Ministry of the Interior, but it is a known website that provides news stories, articles and different journalistic products for audiences, in addition to general services. The ruling parties such as the KDP, CM (change movement), the PUK and KIU also have their own online journalism websites that function as their mouthpiece, but provide at the same time various local and international news stories, articles and other journalistic materials, such as *pukmedia.com*, *sbeiy.com*, *kdp.info*, *kurdiu.org* and others. Moreover, media foundations also have a strong presence on the web through journalistic websites. Some of these media foundations are funded by senior politicians and have popular online news sites such as *rudaw.net*, *xendan.org* and *basnews.com*, while some are independent and operate in the private sector such as *awene.com*, *lvipress.com*, *speemedia.com* and *hawlati.co*, among others.

In terms of style, in general, mainstream news sites dominate the scene of Kurdish online journalism. There are online news sites that do not have print versions, for example, *xendan.org*, *xelk.org*, *pukmedia.com* and *kdp.info*. Meanwhile, some of these mainstream news sites have print or broadcasted versions and this varies between *static* and *dynamic* websites²¹. Online newspapers such as *knew.net* and *alitthad.com*

21 - Static websites are constant and contain the same pre-built content each time the website is loaded, whereas dynamic websites can be generated and updated any time.

for example, have static postings in pdf and HTML, using materials from what their printed newspapers have published; they usually update their content once a day. These websites are mainly used to spread their newspapers and magazines so they can reach more people from everywhere. Others, such as *awene.com*, *lvipress.com*, *basnews.com*, *speemedia.com*, *sharpness.net* and *hawlati.co* are dynamic online news sites and have their printed versions in either newspapers or magazines. These websites provide a section for their printed copy archive, but in the meantime spread and update the latest news, opinion articles and other journalistic materials. Similarly, most of the satellite channels and radio stations have their own websites that function as online news sites, in addition to providing a link for their broadcasted channels of TV and/or radio. As an example, *kurdsatnews.com*, *kurdsat.tv*, *rudaw.net*, *nrttv.com*, *radionawxo.org*, *radionawa.com*, *zagrosv.net*, *kurdistantv.tv* and *knnc.net* are extensions for satellite channels or radio stations, but they are dynamic news sites spreading and updating news stories and other journalistic materials many times per day. There are other online news sites that function as news agencies posting only news stories, such as *www.peyamner.com*.

In terms of identity, most of the online journalism websites that function professionally and operate through a media foundation or known organisation have clear identities and addresses. For example, those websites mentioned above have clear identities and addresses (staff, location, phone number and email), although other websites are anonymous without clear contact addresses. This can include websites that operate in Iraqi Kurdistan and others from abroad. For example, *chatrpress.com*, *nuche.net*, *penusakan.com*, and *kurdistanpost.com* websites were founded and operate abroad anonymously and their news and articles do not display known sources. Similarly, some websites that operate in Iraqi Kurdistan also operate anonymously, such as *zhedar.com*, *milletpress.com*, *malpress.com* and many more.

7.7.2 Language

The majority of the Iraqi Kurdish journalistic websites write in Kurdish; some include both dialects *Soranî* and *Kirmancî* and are in both Kurdish-Arabic and/or Latin alphabet (Sheyholislami, 2010, p. 302). Some are only in the *Soranî* dialect and in the Arabic-

Kurdish alphabet, such as *Awene.com*, *lvinpress.com*, *hawlati.co*, *speemedia.net* and *sharpness.net*. The main audiences of these websites are local people and Kurdish people from the diaspora who basically speak and read in the *Soranî* dialect. Other websites, including *rudaw.net*, *xendan.org*, *peyamner.com*, *pukmedia.com* and *basnews.com* function in both dialects and alphabets alongside one or more foreign languages, such as English, Arabic, Turkish, Persian, Russian and/or German. These media websites are considered important news and information sources for the Kurds from different parts of greater Kurdistan and the diaspora, or to foreign people who seek to know about the latest developments in Kurdish society. Moreover, there are websites that are only in one foreign language and are addressed to audiences from specific societies. As an example, *alitthad.com* and *altaakhipress.com* are only in Arabic, and are directed to Arab audiences while *kurdmedia.com*, *kurdishglobe.net*, *klawrojna.com*, *kurdishaspect.com* and *kurdistantribune.com* are only in English. These serve to familiarise audiences from around the world with the Kurdish culture and to inform them with the latest news, events and attitudes of Kurdish society.

7.7.3 Services

The services provided by Iraqi Kurdish online journalists differ from other websites due to their financial potential, professional levels and skills. For example, many of these websites provide archive sections for audiences to facilitate access to old information posted by the website. They also offer a space for audience feedback through allocating contact email addresses, comment spaces and polls to guarantee interaction between the audiences on one hand and the editors and writers on the other. The poll is a prominent service offered by many news websites, mostly on local political, economic or social subjects. This, to an extent, allows the audience to participate in some common subjects. Polling has become a main part of online news sites and it is another way in which readers can interact with the staff of an online news site; however, as Friend and Singer (2007, p. 151) state, only those users who are interested answer poll questions and sometimes poll results can mislead others. Khaled Sulaiman a columnist and lead trainer of media highlights the services of Kurdish online journalism as follows:

Recently, a kind of interaction has begun between the audiences and the online journalistic websites, which means the contribution of the audiences. Furthermore, the Kurdish media is stepping towards

multimedia and the online newspapers are posting reports in footage, voice, text and photos (Appendix 6.8).

He further adds that online journalism in the Kurdistan region has paid notable attention to the interaction tools:

This interaction frequently exists in online journalism. There are two points in these websites, first people can participate in the polls and second they can write comments on news stories or articles for criticizing and evaluating information (Appendix 6.8).

Hana Şwan Hesen editor-in-chief of *Rêwan* newspaper (affiliated to the PUK), and a member of the higher committee of KJS-Sulaymaniyah branch, believes that Kurdish online journalism has offered some services for users, such as:

Many online news sites have provided space for the people to express their opinions through posting their articles, polls and commenting, which are considered as the best features of online journalism (Appendix 6.4).

Additionally, public services such as weather conditions, currency rates, commodity rates, and links to other websites and media outlets, or governmental services have been provided to the audiences. Eñmed Reşîd Mîre editor-in-chief of *Lvîn* magazine and *Lvinpress.com*, who is classed as an independent journalist, refers to the importance of online journalism in this regard:

In the past, the Kurdish websites, including online newspapers were only working on political life, while in the present day they deal with all details of life. It has become a main source for public services and has displaced other classic mass media outlets in this regard (Appendix 6.1).

A search tool is another service provided by several Kurdish mainstream websites. For example, *rudaw.net*, *knnc.net*, *basnews.com*, *peyamner.com*, *pukmedia.com*, *kurdiu.org* and *sbeiy.com* provide a search tool for their own news and articles; however, some of these search tools are not as effective as required, while others do not work at all.

7.8 Kurdish independent media

Most political parties in the Kurdistan region have their own TV and radio stations, newspapers and online sites, but the majority of media outlets are controlled by the two political parties, the KDP and PUK, considered to be the most powerful parties to rule the region since 1991 (BBC, 2007). In fact, Kurdish independent media began with printed media and then expanded and developed to include online journalism and

broadcasted media. The independent (private sector or free) media in Iraqi Kurdistan is relatively new and goes back to 5th November 2000 when *Hawllatî* (The Citizen), the first Kurdish printed newspaper from the private sector, was circulated by the *Renc* printing house in Sulaymaniyah city (ALMONITOR 2014; Romano 2013; Murad, 2011; Abdulrahman, 2007). Following this point, many other printed, radio and online mainstream website outlets, operated by private sector groups or companies in the Kurdistan region, were founded. Hevall Ebubekir, lecturer at the University of Sulaymaniyah, and supervisor of the academic magazine for humanitarian sciences describes the independent media landscape in the region as follows:

The independent media in Kurdistan started with printed, and then other types of media medium have emerged, such as radio, TV and professional online news sites. In this regard, we probably can mention Radio Newa and NRT TV as outlets from the private sector media. In terms of online, we have a numerous number of online newspapers (Appendix 6.5).

Independent or free media in the Kurdistan region of Iraq refers to various media types radio, printed, online and to an extent TV, that are not associated (covertly or overtly) to the government and political parties, or to their affiliated civil society organisations and officials, either economically or ideologically. Most of the Kurdish journalists and academics interviewed believe that such media sources have an effective presence in the Kurdistan region, relying on their sales, ads or funds that they gain from international organisations for their continuity. As an example, Eñmed Reşîd Mîre, believes that independent media in the Kurdistan region has a strong presence. He identifies several conditions in any media outlet that can be considered as independent in the region:

Independent media has an effective and strong presence. In my opinion, we should define the free or private sector media in the Kurdistan region depending on the experiences not due to the media theories. I believe a free media in Kurdistan is that media which has an independent media discourse and relies on independent finance sources such as its incomes from sales and advertisements and international NGOs subsidies. Additionally, its staff maintain the principles of professionalism, accuracy, courage, and have a general knowledge (Appendix 6.1).

In the same way, Sara Qadir, lecturer at the media department of Sulaymaniyah University and journalist at *Awêne* newspaper, considers financial independence a fundamental condition and states:

In my opinion, an independent media should be independent financially and its journalists should be independent ideologically so they can report and talk about any party. Besides, the journalists should not have any weak points so the officials can misuse them (Appendix 6.10).

Şwan Muñemed, AFP correspondent and director of the *Spee* Company for media training, which publishes *Spee* magazine and operates *speemedia.com*, argues that independent media emerged in the Kurdistan region when the *Hawllatî* newspaper was issued in 2000. He determines some conditions of an independent outlet as such:

Independent media is media that has a humanitarian and independent speech and financing, trying to be committed to the ethical standards (Appendix 6.12).

For other journalists, financial independence and being unbiased are key conditions for independence. For instance, Dana Es'ed editor-in-chief of *Awene.com* online news site highlights these two points as major conditions of any outlet to be independent. He explains:

I believe any mass media outlet that is financially independent and does not rely on subsidies from the political parties, power or senior officials, is independent. Independent media should be in the middle and not biased to either power or the opposition (Appendix 6.2).

In addition to academics and independent journalists, partisan journalists also have their own perspectives on how an independent media source should be. Heyder Cemîl Mñemed Sallñ, who is affiliated to the KIU and editor-in-chief of *KurdlU.org*, believes that the presence of independent media is relative. He also refers to 'Shadow media' channels, which recognise themselves as independent media; while covertly, they are funded and run by senior officials and/or political parties, therefore they are a problem that abuses the real independent media. He also describes independent media in the Kurdistan region:

It is a free and daring media. At the beginning, the private sector media was able to play an important role in the media scene. The staff of this private sector media are well-known people, who were able to talk about many sensitive issues that encouraged ordinary citizens also to do so. They work on an important message, which is freeing the Kurdish individuals from many constraints and breaking the fear that has been made by the powerful elite. I believe the presence of the independent media is relative. Besides, the Shadow media recognizes itself as an independent media to abuse the independent media (Appendix 6.3).

On the other hand, some Kurdish journalists and academics are sceptical about the existence of independent TV, since this type of media requires substantial financial

support. For instance, Sara Qadir, mentions some main independent media outlets as follows:

We can say that the private sector media (independent) constitutes mainly the printed outlets and it started with the printed publications such as *Hawlatî*, *Awêne* and then *Lvîn*. Nowadays, there are many private online newspapers. Besides, we can consider NRT TV as an independent outlet, although there are officials behind it. In terms of the radio station, Radio Newa is one of the radio stations that has been able to bring pressure in the past (Appendix 6.10).

7.9 Most common barriers to online journalism in the Kurdistan region

In general, Kurdish journalists and academics believe that online journalism in Iraqi Kurdistan has developed to a certain extent due to improvements in Internet services. However, for a developing society such as the Kurdish one, online journalism is relatively new and still suffers from many obstacles. Nyaz 'Ebdulla one of the interviewees, and an independent reporter and programme presenter at Radio Newa, traces this back to the relatively new development of improvements to the Internet:

Online journalism in Kurdistan has developed in terms of design, quality, and fast publishing of news and in terms of joining the traditional and new media together. The development of online journalism has occurred because of the improvement in the Internet and a realization of the importance of the websites for the media foundations (Appendix 6.9).

Dana Es'ed editor-in-chief of *Awêne* online news site makes a similar point, adding:

To some extent online journalism has developed in the Kurdistan region, though compared to western countries, we are still underdeveloped (Appendix 6.9).

For Kemal Reuf, director of Shar (city) Company, which publishes Shar magazine and operates Sharpress news website (*Sharpress.net*), being a part of the global world is the natural reason for this relative development. He comments on this aspect as follows:

Online journalism in the Kurdistan region has seen some developments and the reason is that we cannot be isolated from the world. Nowadays a high proportion of the people in the Kurdistan region use the Internet. For example, in the last decade, there were only a few houses in Sulaymaniyah city that had Internet access, but now it has become a daily necessity, like a mobile phone (Appendix 6.7).

Other journalists, however, agree that online journalism has developed to some extent, but remain concerned about the quality of these journalistic websites. For example, Hana Şwan Hesen, states:

If the proportion is the criteria of the development, we can say yes online journalism has developed, but if we consider the quality of the online news sites' texts and their professionalism, this is another issue (Appendix 6.4).

Hevall Ebubekir, although taking a similar line to his fellow interviewees, highlights many technical and professional defects. He comments on this aspect as follows:

Online journalism has not developed so much, because the websites are mostly online versions of the printed media without any updating or proper archive. Besides, many of the websites only post the articles, while a professional online news site should write and post articles, news reports, investigative reports and other journalistic features. Many Kurdish websites only concentrate on opinion articles and do not care about daily events' news and even if they do so, their news is not subjected to checking or probably has been copied from other online news sites. Almost the same procedures used for preparing journalistic materials in the traditional media should be done for online journalism. For instance, journalists should cover the events in the field and then post it on their online newspapers. Nonetheless, recently, some of the new online news sites cover the events professionally and they, hopefully, will provide audiences with new information (Appendix 6.5).

Like Hevall Ebubekir, Şwan Muhemed believes this development in Kurdish online journalism does not have quality, where there is still a lack of professionalism and knowledge about the significance of online journalism, which constitutes a major problem. He states:

The development is horizontal not vertical, in number and not in quality. The reasons for this are too many, such as the lack of professionalism, the lack of understanding of the importance of online journalism, and the lack of an economic vision to make online journalism a profit medium (Appendix 6.12).

Despite these obstacles, the majority of interviewees, including both journalists (independent and partisan) and academics, agree on the fact that Kurdish online journalism in the region has even more barriers and obstacles. For some, the majority of the barriers are technical, for others they are professional and for some they are both. The technical problem is one of the most prominent barriers hindering the improvement of Kurdish online journalism. This includes poor website front-page design, in terms of font types and sizes, colours, necessary links and other technical

aspects, in addition to poor quality Internet network sources and hacking threats. Eħmed Reşîd Mîre highlights the technical barrier to online journalism in the Kurdistan region in terms of hacking and poor Internet services as follows:

The most prominent barrier to online journalism is technical problems. In the Kurdistan region, we still depend on neighbour countries for the Internet supply and often its quality is poor. Our local Internet companies are not capable of providing an Internet service that can bear high loads. Often, when a website has a heavy load from the browsers, it may stop working. Besides, there is the hacking threat to online news sites. For example, our online news site *Lvinpress* has faced hacking attempts many times, which constitutes a serious problem to online journalism (Appendix 6.1).

Hevall Ebubekir, who is also an experienced journalist, agrees with Mîre and considers the technical issues, in particular the poor Internet service, a serious barrier to Kurdish online journalism:

The main problem that faces Kurdish online journalism is technical because Internet services in Kurdistan in general are too poor. Therefore, uploading and downloading is difficult, especially since online news sites rely to a high extent on footage and photos that have large sizes and need a speedy Internet service (Appendix 6.5).

Hacking is one of the technical threats to online journalism. It is believed to be conducted by robust institutions, political parties or Internet companies in the region. As an example, during the election campaigns for the parliamentary elections held in Iraq on 30 April 2014, many of the Kurdish independent mainstream websites were hacked. *Awene.com*, *Sharpress.net*, *Lvinpress.com* and *Hawlati.co* from the private sector media were among those websites hacked only days before voting (Awêne, 2014). Eħmed Reşîd Mîre points out that these hacking attempts against the private sector media were deliberate and conducted by two Internet service companies in the Kurdistan region (Awêne, 2014). This is a common concern among Kurdish journalists and many focused on this aspect when asked about the problems facing Kurdish online journalism. For example, Ĥeyder Cemîl Mħemed Sallħ, classed as a party-affiliated journalist, is in agreement with Mîre regarding hacking and believes that the political parties have many hackers:

Another threat to online journalism is the hacking problem, and many hackers work for a certain political party (Appendix 6.3).

In relation to this problem, Sîrwan Xerîb Eħmed, editor-in-chief of *Xendan.org*, which is classed as a shadow media, makes a similar point and adds that the major problem for their website is hacking:

Sometimes, our online news site faces hacking attempts, but we do not know if they come from an official body, political party or hackers from other countries. For instance, only this year there were more than 150 attempts to hack Xendan.org (Appendix 6.13).

Hevall Ebubekir agrees that there are hacking attempts, but does not feel they are coming from official bodies:

There may have been some attempts to suspend some Internet lines or hacking some particular websites, but this does not come from the official bodies. For example, during the demonstration on 17th Feb. 2011, the Internet lines and mobile phone services were stopped for a short time, but this has not become a phenomenon (Appendix 6.5).

The technical barrier concept also includes a lack of skills in using and dealing with the Internet. Ėeyder Cemîl Mħemed Sallħ refers to this problem by stating:

Another threat to online journalism is that in general the Kurds have only a little knowledge about the best ways of using online journalism and its techniques (Appendix 6.3).

Şwan Muħemed agrees with this point and also considers a lack of knowledge of the Internet's features to be another technical problem:

One of the problems is technical, because so far the scientific capability in Kurdistan is not as good as is needed to exploit this new media technology properly (Appendix 6.12).

In the same way, Dana Es'ed believes that the Internet has not been exploited perfectly for journalism purposes. He comments:

We could not perfectly take advantage of the Internet as a mass media tool. We are in need of training for improving the online news sites so we can use them in a perfect way for having the most impact on audiences (Appendix 6.2).

A funding problem that mainly faces the independent online news sites is considered for many journalists to be the main reason for other emerging barriers. For example, a lack of professionalism is another obstacle in Kurdish online journalism, which according to some of the Kurdish journalists is due to a lack of funding. This problem in general has led to a lack of experienced and skilled editors, journalists, linguistic

problems and so on. Dana Es'ed traces back many of these problems to the funding problem:

One of the problems is the finance impediment. For example, designing *Awêne* online newspaper has cost almost 30,000 Dollars, which constitutes a significant financial load on the private sector media. Another problem is the technical aspect. We suffer from the lack of an online expert technician and this has made the majority of the Kurdish online newspaper designs poor. Besides, the lack of professionalism also is one of the problems of online journalism, especially for the private sector media since improving this aspect needs finance potentials (Appendix 6.2).

Overall, a lack of professionalism is prevalent in online journalism as is the case in traditional media and constitutes a serious barrier to this type of journalism. This includes bias, lack of objectivity, harming national security, unknown and unreliable news sources, lack of knowledge, editing and linguistic mistakes, copyright violations and others. For example, Taher Hasso Zibari, head of the media department at the University of Salahaddin in Erbil, states that “media in Kurdistan is not practiced professionally and it has not been able to abide by any moral standards of the profession” (The Kurdish Globe, 2015). Frequently, Kurdish media channels reveal secret military information unintentionally that may harm national security (The Kurdish Globe, 2015). Sara Qadir highlights a lack of objectivity as one of the professional problems:

The problem of online news sites is that instead of talking objectivity, they talk personally, which is not acceptable (Appendix 6.10).

Overall, many of the obstacles and barriers in traditional media in the Kurdistan region also apply to online journalism. For example, a lack of professionalism, as mentioned previously, the absence of a common and unified Kurdish writing language is reflected likewise in online journalism. According to some of the interviewees, the absence of a common unified Kurdish writing language has made Kurdish online journalism more chaotic. They believe that each online mainstream news site has its own style of writing and they have not made any contribution to improving the language. Sirwan Xerîb Ehmed provides a good example of the problem of writing language:

Currently, each online news site has its own style of writing, for example, Xendan.org, NRT, PUKmedia.com and others have different styles of writing. This has not helped in creating a unified writing

language. Therefore, we can say that online journalism has a negative impact on the Kurdish language (Appendix 6.13).

Nyaz 'Ebdulla agrees with this view of point and adds:

I think online journalism has had a negative impact and has made the situation even worse and created chaos (Appendix 6.9).

Serdar Muḥemed, editor-in-chief of independent *Awêne* newspaper, who was recently listed as one of the 100 Information Heroes by *Reporters Without Borders*, is also concerned about the chaos of the writing language in both printed and online news sites, and provides a good example of the effect of the absence of a unified writing language:

We have many problems, especially in terms of language. The absence of a unified writing language is one of the problems of both the printed and the online versions of *Awêne* newspaper. To illustrate, the printed *Awêne* newspaper only circulates in Sulaymaniyah, Erbil and Kirkuk while it does not reach Dhok because we have the problem of language. Likewise, there are many good newspapers circulating in Dhok but the people in the other cities have not heard about them (Appendix 6.11).

Moreover, the lack of access to information is a problem that faces all of the media outlets in the Kurdistan region to varying degrees, but for online journalism it is more serious since, as Sîrwan Xerîb Eḥmed states: “the officials do not have enough knowledge about online journalism and they only recognize TV and printed media, therefore sometimes they hesitate in dealing with the online news sites” (Appendix 6.13). In addition to access to information and impeding journalists from their work, safety issues also pose a serious problem. Sîrwan Xerîb Eḥmed claims that “journalists of online journalism face threats, humiliations and impediments” (Appendix 6.13). Hêyder Cemîl Mḥemed Sallḥ also has the same point of view:

There are threats on the journalists that work for online news sites. The journalist is a journalist whether working in online journalism or other types of media. The authorities always have an aggressive view towards journalists (Appendix 6.3).

In contrast, some journalists believe that online journalism is less vulnerable to these threats than traditional media, since many of the websites are anonymous and/or can modify and remove their content easily, and they are not held accountable, therefore their safety problems are less significant. For instance, Dana Es'ed argues:

In general, the threats to online journalism are less than other types of media. A Kurdish online news site can operate anywhere in the world

without having a known identity, while the printed and broadcasted media channels should have known addresses (Appendix 6.2).

Şwan Muħemed agrees with Dana Es'ed, at least in terms of legal prosecutions, and argues:

Legally, I think online journalism is less vulnerable to lawsuits than traditional media, because online news sites are able to modify, correct and even remove content and mistakes at any time, while in printed media as an example, the articles and other journalistic material will remain (Appendix 6.12).

However, Khaled Sulaiman disagrees with his fellow interviewees, and argues that online journalism in the Kurdistan region has no problems at all:

No, it has no problem because nowadays there are some fake websites that do not have clear addresses or owners. Besides, most of the online journalistic sites in Kurdistan have not registered with a government body or in a company, therefore even if they publish illegal topics, it is difficult to sue them (Appendix 6.8).

Copyright violation in Kurdish online journalism is a widespread phenomenon. This right is a legal right that protects by law an author or creator's complete rights to control an original work to prevent other persons from exploiting it for their own advantage (Gunter, 2003, p. 138-139). According to Bradshaw and Rohumaa (2011, p. 183), this right includes the control of reproduction, adaptation and distribution of their work and usually protects any literary, dramatic, artistic or musical work, sound recording, film broadcast or typographical arrangement. Most countries have enacted regulations for this right, in the UK as an example, this concept goes back to the Statute of Anne in 1710, and now it has been regulated by the new law of Copyright Designs and Patents of 1988.

In terms of copyright on the Internet, Hill and Lashmar (2014, p. 243) believe that stealing and copying materials on the web is very easy as it can be done through copying and pasting, saving and downloading, therefore the laws of copyright are safeguarded for protecting these rights. Overall, copyright on the Internet is a controversial issue. Some believe that the ease of spreading information in whatever way is a supportive step for freedom of speech; while in contrast, opponents see that this provides great freedom to those who would exploit other's property for their own gain (Gunter, 2003, p. 139). Lessig (1999, p. 124), as an example, believes that the laws regulating copyright on the web, through imposing sanctions for the violation of these rights, are threatening and "continue to threaten a certain consequence if ... defied".

He believes that intellectual property protection through laws may be possible for technology, law and other fields that cost money, but in cyberspace, copyright laws have enabled copyright holders to limit innovations (Lessig, 2006, p. 169-170).

With regard to the Kurdistan region of Iraq, the regulations for protecting copyright are not effective. Alongside the Law of Rights of Inventors (Copyrights) No.17, as approved by the Kurdistan parliament in 2012, there is the Iraqi Law of Copyright Protection No.3 of 1971, but none have been implemented in Kurdistan and most journalists have no knowledge of them. Therefore, the phenomenon of copyright violation has become widespread in most fields and this is reflected more in online journalism. For many journalists it is considered a problem when it comes to copying journalistic productions. The majority of the Kurdish journalistic websites copy news, information, footage and pictures from each other and/or from foreign media channels and websites. Eħmed Reşîd Mîre describes the online violation of copyright of journalistic productions, which according to him has become a phenomenon, as stealing, suggesting in the meantime passing an effective law for regulating this aspect:

This has become a phenomenon among the Kurdish online news sites and websites, and most of them steal footage, images and texts from each other. If we have a special law for online journalism that prevents such a phenomenon, I believe online journalism can be promoted (Appendix 6.1).

Regulation of Kurdish online journalism in order to prevent abuse, defamation, privacy intrusion and other ethical and professional violations is a demand of some Kurdish journalists and academics. The prevalent feeling among those interviewed is that there is chaos in Kurdish online journalism, since there is no special law for regulating this aspect of Kurdish media. Meanwhile, others prefer to retain the current situation because they are worried that the existence of a special law may restrict this part of the Kurdish media that for them is considered a liberal space. On the other hand, journalists believe that even if there was a special law for online journalism, it would not be capable of regulating this type of journalism, since many of the journalistic websites, their owners, writers and editors are anonymous, while some operate abroad. Sara Qadir, for example, considers the absence of a special law for online journalism to prevent ethical violations as a weak point and comments:

We have no special law for online journalism, which is a weak point of the Kurdish media. The problem is that most of the ethical violations

take place through online media, but we have no law to deal with that despite it becoming a popular media outlet (Appendix 6.10).

Meanwhile, Hevall Ebubekir believes that this issue is universal and even if there was a law for dealing with online journalism, it would be difficult to deal with those websites that operate abroad and violate public morals, for example:

In fact, there are efforts to enact a law for regulating online journalism, though this problem is universal, for example the Internet service provider is in the USA or the UK and the website is operated in Kurdistan, so in such situations it is difficult to deal with the websites legally. For those online newspapers that are known, or there are known writers, it is easy to open a lawsuit against them in case they violate public morals, though what should be done if the writer is abroad or unknown, or the website is operating outside Kurdistan? It is problematic and needs to be resolved (Appendix 6.5).

On the other hand, other Kurdish journalists believe that there is no special law for regulating online journalism so it is not misused, but it has been controlled to some extent by other laws such as Presswork No. 35 of 2007 and Preventing Abuse of Communication Technologies No. 6 of 2008. For instance, Hêyder Cemîl Mîhemed Sallî states:

There is no special law for dealing with online journalism and it is dealt with in the context of other laws, especially the law of preventing the improper use of cell phones and technology (Appendix 6.3).

Likewise, Hana Şwan Hesen holds the same stance in this situation and claims that so far the issues of online journalism have been dealt with through other regulations. But, she considers this a problem, suggesting in the meantime passing a special law for online journalism:

There is no special law to deal with online journalism and it is dealt with in the context of other regulations, which is one of the problems. There should be a special law for regulating online journalism, which should be drafted after consultation with experts in this field (Appendix 6.4).

Nevertheless, other journalists prefer this situation because they as journalists are afraid of drafting a law that censors online journalism. For example, Nyaz 'Ebdulla shows her concern:

So far, there is no law for regulating online journalism and I hope that does not exist because I'm afraid of censoring it (Appendix 6.9).

It seems that a common concern of Kurdish journalists and academics is confusion in dealing legally with the issues that arise from online journalism. For some of those

interviewed it is not clear which laws apply to the issues of online journalism, while others point out that online issues are able to be dealt with through existing laws.

7.10 Conclusion

This chapter produced a deep knowledge of the development of online journalism in the Kurdistan region and its contribution in providing various services to journalists and citizens, in addition to exploring the main challenges to this style of media. It showed that despite online journalism in the Kurdistan region developing to an extent that various types of online sites try to provide services in different fields and languages, there are many obstacles impeding its growth. These obstacles, which are mostly widespread in countries with emerging democracies, vary between professional, technical, legal and financial issue. Some are common obstacles for both traditional and online journalism, while others only relate to online features. For example, the technical barriers, such as poor Internet services, hacking threats, lack of skills using the web and poor design only relate to online journalism, whereas most of the professional issues such as bias, lack of objectivity, absence of a unified writing language, lack of finance, lack of access to information and safety also exist in traditional media. Moreover, as the chapter showed, there is confusion in how to deal with online abuses such as defamation or privacy intrusion because it seems that even the journalists themselves are unsure whether such issues are dealt with by existing laws, or whether there should be a special law for regulating this aspect.

Chapter 8: The impact of online journalism on freedom of speech in the Kurdistan region

8.1 Introduction

To understand what role online journalism plays in Kurdish society in terms of providing space for free expression, it is essential to examine what the content of this style of media tells us in this regard. It is also imperative to examine the most prominent foundations of online journalism for supporting freedom of speech in this emergent society.

This chapter examines the role of the independent online news sites, as these involve the most common style of online journalism in the Kurdistan region, in terms of allowing the spread of free expression and critical opinions. The role of online news sites in supporting freedom of speech in the Kurdistan region, from the perspectives of the most relevant groups to this topic, constituting Kurdish journalists, academics and media trainers, has been analysed and reported in this chapter. To verify and evaluate how accurate, reliable and valid these perspectives are, thematic analysis has also been conducted on the content of a sample of opinion articles of a particular case – the extension of the presidential term of the Kurdistan region – on the *Awêne* online news site. Freedom of expression is significant at all levels in any society because when citizens can speak and express their opinions freely, especially about public issues of common interest, this means that society is free and it enables the government and official institutions in the country to understand the public's concerns, needs, opinions and interests. It also guarantees and denotes the right of citizens to openly criticise illegal activities, injustices, corruption of the authorities and other parties in that society (Cooray, 1985; Habermas, 1974, p. 49). Therefore, as mentioned in the methodology chapter, the researcher conducted thematic analysis on opinion articles on *Awêne* online news site (Awene.com), which focused on the extension of the presidential term from 30th June to 15th July 2013. This is in order to demonstrate the extent to which critical opinions on important public issues, in this case, extending the presidential term for two more years through a resolution from the Kurdistan parliament, are allowed to be expressed and spread. Five main themes were identified in these articles and analysed to display the content of these articles and to show how

and why these authors expressed such critical opinions, in order to clarify the extent to which free speech is allowed in online journalism. In addition, the concept of freedom of speech and the role of the Internet and other new information/communication technologies in supporting freedom of expression is addressed and explained in this chapter from the perspectives of relevant theorists and scholars.

As such, this chapter constitutes three parts. In the first part definitions, the nature of freedom of speech, the role of the Internet in underpinning it, and the international and local charters and regulations for protecting the right to freedom of speech, are provided. The second part is devoted to discussing the interviewees' perspectives on the effects of online journalism on underpinning freedom of speech, and the third part is a thematic analysis of the content from the sample of critical opinion articles posted on the *Awêne* online news site.

8.2 Freedom of speech

One of the fundamental rights of humans is freedom of speech. This right, which enables the exchange and expression of ideas and information freely, without interference by public authority, is pivotal in all societies for a democratic life that guarantees transparency and accountability of the political systems (UNHR, 2012; Barendt, 1985). Due to the importance of freedom of speech, several scholars have clarified and developed theories of this basic right of humans. For example, John Stuart Mill believes that freedom of expression is strongly linked to the truth. He emphasises that freedom of expression must be protected from any attempt to suppress it because the opinions and information that are expressed may be true (Mill, 1859/1974, p. 16). Therefore, when freedom of expression is violated, the truth is suppressed. On the other hand, Jack Balkin considers freedom of speech as enabling ordinary citizens to contribute freely in disseminating thoughts and in producing meanings. For him, it is the ability to contribute to a continuous process in the production of culture through different means and technologies of expression. It also means that citizens participate in debates through interacting with other participants and each in turn affects the other, and the attitudes of the participants in a democratic culture production can be agreeing, rejecting, criticising, adding ideas or creating new thoughts (Balkin, 2004, p. 5). On the other hand, Thomas Scanlon states that freedom of expression is an act of humans that aims to communicate to one or more people

through various means. He also argues that this concept is a wide category because it includes many aspects:

In addition to many acts of speech and publication, it includes displays of symbols, failures to display them, demonstrations, many musical performances, and some bombings, assassinations, and self-immolations. In order for any act of expression, it is sufficient that it be linked with some proposition or attitude which it is intended to convey (Scanlon, 1972, p. 206).

The importance of freedom of speech lies in the fact that it protects the significant abilities of humans to contribute to culture production and this is vital because humans, “are made of culture; the right to participate in culture is valuable because it lets us have a say in the forces that shape the world we live in and make us who we are” (Balkin, 2004, p. 5). Furthermore, it is the cornerstone of democracy and a society is democratic only when every citizen, not only a small number of people, has equal opportunity for freedom of speech, i.e. contributes to producing, spreading and developing ideas and meanings (Balkin, 2004, p. 4). In the same way, Forbes Edgar believes that democracy depends on people’s rights in participating in debates, criticising and expressing opinions. To illustrate:

One of the principles upon which democratic societies are based is that people should be free to express their opinions, contribute to debates, scrutinise their politicians, adore and criticize their celebrities, be free to tweet on Twitter, post on Facebook, blog and generally interact as individuals within their society (Edgar, 2011, p. 162).

Besides, freedom of speech is individual and collective also. It is collective because it is cultural where citizens interact with each other:

People exercise their freedom by participating in this system: they participate by interacting with others and by making new meanings and new ideas out of old ones. Even when people repeat what others have said, their reiteration often carries an alteration in meaning or context (Balkin, 2004, p. 5-6).

Therefore, the process of freedom of speech can be made through the synergy of a set of mechanisms. Balkin (2004, p. 48-49) identifies these mechanisms as such: the policies of the state that encourage collective use and participation in Internet and other communication technologies, technological structures that promote decentralisation and more mass participation, and recognising and implementing the constitutional rights against any possible control, especially by the state. It also should

be noted that guaranteeing access to channels of expression for people is one of the most prominent conditions of freedom of speech (Scanlon, 1972, p. 223).

The impact of new mass media communication technologies in promoting freedom of expression in the developing countries is an important theme, in particular for the political and academic elite and journalists. The invention of the Internet and online websites, and their adoption since the 1990s, has affected participation opportunities and free speech for media outlets, their staff and for ordinary citizens. Unlike traditional mass media outlets such as radio, TV and newspapers, where the spread of information and communication is controlled by a number of journalists and media gatekeepers, the web has offered many more opportunities for people to publish, receive, communicate, share ideas and participate in public debates and even in media production (Stein, 2008). According to Dimitrova and Neznanski (2006) and Galley (2000, p.41), the web has many features including: interactivity, convergence, personalisation, speed and targeting that enable it to play a significant role in the democratisation process. These characteristics provide an opportunity for overcoming, to a great extent, censorship. Online journalism is, therefore, unique in that it is the major mass media channel which is an important forum for professional journalists, politicians as well as ordinary citizens. It has helped to generate the growth and expansion of political information by providing new channels, which exceed the expectations of the traditional media (Davis, 2010, p.106).

Overall, the Internet transcends many of the classical censorships and authority controls that traditional media experience (Ang and Nadarajan, 2013; Curran, 2012, p.8-12). Therefore, this new outlet of mass media has supported freedom of speech and promotion of democracy, particularly in emerging democracies through providing affordable forums for different views and attitudes, and through empowering citizens to participate in the spread and production of culture to a high extent (Curran, 2012, p. 13; Murdoch, 2006; Perez, 2004, p.136-137; Zittel, 2004, p. 79). The Internet is also considered a space for communicative events with no political, social and cultural boundaries and an interactive media tool, which boosts the manner in which people with mutual and shared dialogues are linked together (Sheyholisalmi, 2011, p. 150; Noveck, 2000). Balkin (2004, p. 7), who describes the development of the Internet and other technologies of communication and information as a “digital revolution”, identifies the key ways that have helped in expanding the opportunities of freedom of

speech. He first believes that this digital revolution has lowered the costs of copying and publishing information and consequently numerous people are able to spread their opinions inexpensively and broadly. A good example of this can be seen in the various types of websites that are easy to access and easy to make, which have helped people in creating, spreading and receiving speeches and information at a low cost. The second way is that because of the Internet, communication now exceeds geographical and cultural borders easily and this enables even ordinary people to reach others in any society and interact with them. Another factor is reducing the costs of “innovating with existing information, commenting on it, and building upon it” (Balkin, 2004, p. 7), through copying, storing, pasting various content and re-using it, either by editing or sending it to others. The fourth way in Balkin’s argument is that spreading and modification of information cheaply and easily through the Internet by numerous people has democratised speeches (Balkin, 2004, p. 7-8). Nevertheless, despite the crucial role of the Internet and other new information and communication technologies in supporting freedom of speech, it is believed that these same technologies may develop new ways of control that may restrict people’s democratic participation in the cultural system. Therefore, for further enhancing the principles of free speech, such as through collective participation, interactivity, the power of altering and transforming culture, it also must be protected through “technological design and through administrative and legislative regulation of technology, as well as through the more traditional method of judicial creation and recognition of constitutional rights” (Balkin, 2004, p. 3-5). Many rules for regulating and guaranteeing rights of free expression have been adopted and have come into effect. These consist of a combination of international and local regulations that determine what anyone should be allowed to freely express. Moreover, other laws and specific regulations concerning the work of the media and press as a significant means for expressing, have been adopted which regulate and determine “what can be expressed when and what the limitations to such expression are” (Edgar, 2011, p. 163). For instance, on a global level, the right to freedom of speech has been guaranteed by international charters. One of the most prominent charters is the United Nation’s Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) that in Article 19, has guaranteed this right to everyone in the world:

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Additionally, the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) also emphasised this right in Article 10 stating that the authorities must not interfere with people's freedom in holding and exchanging ideas and information. In addition to the international conventions, many countries' constitutions around the world have addressed freedom of expression as a protected right for their people. For example, in the USA, this right is protected by the first amendment to the US constitution in 1791, which states that: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances" (White House, 2013; Herbert, 2000, p. 81). Iraq is also among those countries that have guaranteed this right and other related rights in the constitution as follows:

Article 38: The State shall guarantee in a way that does not violate public order and morality:

- A. Freedom of expression using all means.
- B. Freedom of press, printing, advertisement, media and publication.
- C. Freedom of assembly and peaceful demonstration, and this shall be regulated by law.

In the case of the Kurdistan region, freedom of speech either for journalists or ordinary citizens is legally guaranteed through the Iraqi constitution and special regulations such as the Presswork regulation No. 35 of 2007, and Right to Access Information No. 11 of 2013, as discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

8.3 Perspectives on the role of online journalism on freedom of speech

The emerging development of the Internet in the Kurdistan region has led to the foundation of online journalism as a new outlet of mass media. Scholars believe that one of the major principles of this new medium is that it enables people to exchange ideas and information, participate in public debates, create the social knowledge necessary for informed democratic citizenship, and many more features that were not available previously in the traditional mass media (Edgar, 2011, p. 163; Stein, 2008, p. 1). Moreover, other principles that the Internet is based upon, are the fact that it enables open communication, the exchange of information and opinions, learning, and

bringing people all over the world closer together since it is a global accessible medium. As this section will explain in more depth, the Kurdish journalists, academics and media trainers constituting the thirteen interviewees were, in general, optimistic about the ability of online journalism to promote freedom of speech to everyone who has access to it. Journalists (independent and partisan) and the media academics and trainers interviewed, appear to have built hopes on online journalism, as the prevalent feeling among them was that online journalism has had a significant influence on encouraging and underpinning freedom of speech. All of the interviewees agreed that online journalism strengthens freedom of speech in the Kurdistan region. They mentioned several reasons that support their optimistic attitudes towards online journalism. For example, Ehmed Reşîd Mîre editor-in-chief of the independent *Lvîn* magazine and *Lvinpress.com* online news site, traces the role of online journalism in promoting freedom of speech, to the fact that it exceeds censorship, it is open to the people, in addition to the lack of legal responsibility for what is published online in the Kurdistan region. He states:

Online journalism has a significant impact on promoting freedom of speech because it exceeds censorship; it is more open than the traditional media outlets and has fewer responsibilities. The lack of legal responsibility sometimes allows more work, which by this, in turn affects positive free expression (Appendix 6.1).

In the same way, Dana Es'ed, another interviewee from the group of independent journalists working for mainstream news websites and other traditional outlets, and editor-in-chief of the independent *Awêne* (mirror) online news site (*Awene.com*), emphasises his fellow's point of view that since there is no censorship in online journalism, it provides a broad space for freedom of speech in Kurdish society:

Online journalism, including professionals and non-professionals, in addition to social network websites, has had significant impact on the promoting and expansion of freedom of speech. Besides, there are many Kurdish websites that have no restrictions, where people even can defame, insult and violate others' privacy. This means that online journalism has offered a broad space not only for sober criticisms, but also to the negative side of the freedom of speech (Appendix 6.2).

Other interviewees also referred to the inability of the authorities to control online journalism as making this medium offer more opportunities for freedom of speech. For instance, Kemal Reuf, director of the independent *Shar* (city) Company, which publishes *Shar* magazine and operates an online news site (*Sharpress.net*), argues that

because the authorities are not capable of closing down online websites as in traditional media cases, online journalism not only has a significant impact on promoting freedom of speech, but it also has made the authorities give up their attempts to close down traditional outlets. In Reuf's words:

Certainly online journalism has an impact in underpinning freedom of speech. I remember first, when we began to circulate *Hawlatî* newspaper, we were afraid the authority would close the newspapers down, though now there is no such fear and this is not because the political parties have become more democratic, but because they realize that even if they close down our printed media, there will still be online media. Therefore, it has had an impact on supporting freedom of speech (Appendix 6.7).

Nyaz 'Ebdulla, a reporter and programme presenter at Radio *Newa*, also shows her optimism about online journalism's significant influences in favour of freedom of speech and considers it to be the proper medium to enable people to say whatever they want. She states:

Online journalism has had a broad and significant impact on promoting freedom of speech in Kurdistan over the past years...What is not allowed to be published in the traditional media outlets, is published on online sites. Online sites have a substantial role and they are incomparable with the traditional media outlets in promoting freedom of expression (Appendix 6.9).

Online journalism is also believed to have become the space for various voices and colours through enabling a variety of thoughts and opinions to be presented. According to Serdar Muhemed, editor-in-chief of the independent *Awêne* newspaper, online journalism has reflected a variety of thoughts and voices and has provided a great space for talking and debating. He adds:

To a good extent, they have had impact because they have provided a better opportunity for talking, expressing and exchanging opinions. I think the Internet, to a high extent, has served various voices and colours all over the world not only in Kurdistan. The Internet has enabled displaying many thoughts with different views instead of one view. Moreover, if the traditional media outlets do not provide news or information about particular subjects, people will resort to the online sites (Appendix 6.11).

Not only did the journalists from the independent (private sector) media feel this way, but also all interviewees from group two (journalists working for mainstream news websites and other traditional outlets affiliated to the political parties - ruling or

opposition parties), had almost the same opinions and were optimistic of the role of online journalism as a tool for promoting freedom of speech. Exceeding authorities' control and censorship, was a common reason enabling online journalism to support freedom of expression. For example, Hana Şwan Hesen editor-in-chief of *Rêwan* (guide) newspaper (affiliated to the PUK) and member of the higher committee of Kurdistan Journalists Syndicate (KJS), Sulaymaniyah branch, comments:

Yes, it has had influences, but relatively. Since online journalism is out of control and censorship and people can express their views on it freely, it has had noticeable impact (Appendix 6.4)

Sîrwan Xerîb Ehméd editor-in-chief of Xendan.org online news site, which is funded by a senior politician of the PUK, makes a similar point and argues that there is no censorship in online journalism, therefore, it offers a large space for freedom of speech that sometimes could become chaotic:

Largely and to the extent of chaos, online journalism has influenced freedom of speech. In Kurdistan what is not allowed to be said in the printed media, is allowed to be said in online media because there is no censorship in online journalism (Appendix 6.13).

For some of these participants, anonymity is another reason enabling people to talk. In general, when on the Internet, users do not need to show their gender, political attitude, religious beliefs, occupation or age, therefore this helps in fostering open debate and assists people to overcome many boundaries to express their opinions freely and participate in various debates and discussions (Da Silva, 2013, p. 179; Wang, 2007, p. 6). It has been argued that the anonymity in online journalism sometimes constitutes a problem when it is misused and leads to defamation, inaccuracy and undermines trust among users (Da Silva, 2013; Wang, 2007, p. 7), but overall this encourages people to feel free in expressing their opinions on the Internet. Heyder Cemîl Mîhemmed Sallî editor-in-chief of KurdIU.org online news site, which is affiliated to the KIU, agrees with his fellow interviewees about the impact of online journalism on fostering freedom of speech and points out that anonymity helps journalists and people to avoid potential threats, therefore, they can express their opinion freely without any fears:

Certainly, online journalism has a very positive impact, because frequently the sources in online journalism are unknown. No doubt that in Kurdistan we have the problem of freedom of speech and who express his opinions freely, may face political, psychological and physical

threats and pressures, though, since in online journalism the identity of the writers and the journalists could be anonymous, thus it is difficult to be prosecuted (Appendix 6.3).

Dana Es'ed agrees with this point of view and adds:

What is said in online journalism in Kurdistan is not being said in printed media because in online sites, there is a broader space for freedom of speech and people can express their views even anonymously (Appendix 6.2).

Media academics and trainers, forming group three of the interviewees, agree with the prevalent belief of online journalism's positive effects on freedom of speech. Sara Qadir, lecturer at the media department of Sulaymaniyah University and journalist at *Awêne* newspaper, links the crucial role of online journalism on freedom of expression with the absence of a special law in regulating this style of journalism. She comments:

Because there is not a lot of pressure in online journalism and it is not subjected to any law, therefore, people are able to write for online journalism much freer. People can say their words and express their opinions freely in online journalism (Appendix 6.10).

From the perspective of another interviewee, anonymity is also the most prominent reason making online journalism promote freedom of speech. Hevall Ebubekir, lecturer at the University of Sulaymaniyah and supervisor of the academic magazine for humanitarian science, points out that since anyone can anonymously establish a site on the web they can publish opinions freely. He agrees with other interviewees on the undeniable role of online journalism on freedom of speech, stating:

Certainly, online journalism has participated significantly in widening and promoting freedom of speech because the participation of the people increases the opportunity of freedom and this is progressing (Appendix 6.5).

Hiwa Osman, a blogger, media developer and consultant, who is also director of *Mediawan* foundation for media training, believes that it is through two ways that online journalism has promoted free expression: commenting and writing (Appendix 6.6). He considers the ease of access and the ability for everyone to make personal websites to state their beliefs on the Internet as the major benefit of this medium. He comments:

Some of the benefits of the Internet are that it provides everyone the opportunity for free publishing. Everyone can have his or her own blogs and post whatever they want, though in terms of technology I believe journalists still need to learn about how to use the Internet. It even has

benefits for the environment in Kurdistan since it has made paper consumption much less (Appendix 6.6).

Xalid Sleman, a journalist, columnist and lead trainer of media, also agrees on the positive influence of online journalism and states that because of online journalism “there are many criticisms of the political elite and system, companies, the figures of the political scene and many other fields” (Appendix 6.8). On the other hand, to other participants, the impact of online journalism exceeds promoting freedom of speech. For instance, Şwan Muħemed, AFP correspondent, trainer and director of the independent *Spee* (white) Company for media training, which publishes *Spee* magazine and operates the *speemedia* online news site (*speemedia.com*) believes that online journalism creates a national democratic thought in Kurdistan:

In fact, because of online journalism, a national democratic thought is about to be created in the media and then it will enter the political centres. It has had an impact on the freedom of speech, but we have to notice that the political midst has not absorbed this so far (Appendix 6.12).

From the perspectives of the relevant groups, compared to traditional mass media outlets, online journalism in the Kurdistan region has become the medium that has allowed the expression of critical opinions and participation in political discussions to a more free and open extent. The interviewees traced the role of online journalism in fostering freedom of expression in the Kurdistan region to many reasons, namely: there is no special law for regulating online journalism; inability of the authorities to control and censor it; anonymity; the nature of the Internet which helps to transcend many barriers; and the ease of access and use.

8.4 Thematic analysis of the opinion articles

As mentioned in the methodology chapter, the aim of analysing the discourse of these opinion articles from the *Awêne* online news site is to understand the content of online journalism and explain the extent to which the expression of critical opinions is allowed on online news sites. This will be done through identifying and interpreting the meanings of the themes and patterns of opinion articles. The topic of these articles is very sensitive for a society like the Kurdish one, which is a developing society where criticism of senior politicians, explicitly and overtly through media outlets, was until recently, considered to cross a red line that often led to economical and physical

violations against journalists, writers, media bodies and/or ordinary citizens (as mentioned in Chapter 5 of this thesis).

Most of the articles from the sample were posted online with clear names and photos of the authors and only two were anonymous. The main purpose of these articles was to criticise the process of extending the presidential term, but each supported their opinions with several arguments and points of view through accusing the president, parliament, the ruling parties and political elite of many accusations and allegations, despite calling for a stand against this process. In these critical articles, the main themes from the 11 articles posted on the *Awêne* online news site (from 30 June to 14 July 2014) on the extension of the presidential term, were identified and analysed. The researcher summarised and highlighted all paragraphs and sentences that focused on the topic, so the raw data could be in a form that enabled easy repeated reviewing. This led to developing several preliminary themes, but after reviewing them several times, and comparing and identifying their similarities, it was possible to reduce these to five main themes (see Chapter 3 methodology), as follows:



Figure 14: Front page of *Awêne* online news site (Awene.com)

8.4.1 Illegitimate president

Several authors manifestly described the process of extending the presidential term as an illegal process and believed that from that point onwards the president had no legitimacy from the people, and some considered the process a coup. For example, an article entitled '*Be daxewe*' (What a pity) (Muḥemed, 2013) published on 30th June

2013, i.e. on the same day that the Kurdistan parliament approved the law to extend the presidential term for two more years, condemns this action, stating that the action had not got consensus, therefore it was illegitimate:

It seems that the president does not care about the fact that he will be in the presidency for the next two years by acclamation of only some people. He is even not the president of all of the KDP and PUK (both ruling parties) because he has not got consensus among the political bureau of the PUK, neither among the leadership committee nor the party members.

The writer of this article accuses Barzani of neglecting his promise of not running for a third term and not distorting the reputation of his struggle for the seat of power. What the author says here is that the president has betrayed his promises for accepting the extension of a third term and accordingly has lost his credibility among the people. In Kurdish society when you accuse someone of betraying a promise or lying, it may lead to a fight and a serious argument, therefore, when you accuse the president, who has considerable power in this society, this may be considered crossing a red line according to the authorities' perspectives, especially when this accusation has been expressed openly through a media outlet.

The writer also blames some of the members of the PUK political bureau for their attitude in neglecting their followers through trying to give legitimacy to an illegitimate process in a political bargain with parliament, which is a legitimate institution. Kawe Muñemed, the author of the article, in addition to condemning this action, also wants to send a message to the two ruling parties, the president, and those members of the PUK political bureau who supported the action, that the people, including many of their followers, refuse this process because there was an illegal acclamation on elections. He therefore emphasises that the president is not legitimate because his new term has come as a result of an acclamation.

In another article entitled '*Aya çarenûsî Ĥusinî Mubarek heldebijêrin?*' (Do you choose the fate of Hosni Mubarak?) (Herdî, 2013a), the writer explicitly expresses his critical opinion and states that in a tragic-comedy play, the KDP and PUK have extended the presidential term for Masoud Barzani for another two years in an illegal and compulsory process, where they breached all principles of law and politics. Asos Herdî, the writer of this article, describes the process as illegal, suggesting in the meantime that this will not gain legitimacy from the people. He severely criticises the

president and the political elite who voted for the process, stating that they made a big mistake. He also sends a message to them that they have participated in an illegal and unconstitutional move.



Figure 15: The opinion article ‘Aya çarenûsî Hûsinî Mubarek helldibijêrîn?’ (Do you choose the fate of Hosni Mubarak?) by Asos Herdî (Herdî, 2013a)

Another author, Kemal Heme Sergellwîy, in the article ‘*Bo Sê serkrdekeyi opozsiyon: êwe pêşmanikewn ême bedwatanda dêyin*’ (To the three opposition leaders: be at the forefront and we follow you) (Sergellwîy, 2013) writes that there is considerable friction from the people of the Kurdistan region who completely resent the illegal, not-logical and immoral move of the PUK and KDP in the so-called parliament of the Kurdistan region, where the presidential term was extended for Barzani through illegal procedures. The writer expresses his and the public’s resentment to this illegal step and argues that different classes of society, such as journalists, intellectuals, and even ordinary citizens have had strong reactions, which means that the people will not accept this process and the imposition of an illegal president.

Similarly, the anonymous author of ‘*Kudeta: dwaneyi hêzu yasa*’ (Coups: the twin of force and law) (Awene, 2013c) severely criticises parliament for approving the project of extending the presidential term. The author writes:

In parliament, which is the place of drafting laws, this time a resolution has been drafted that does not have any legal grounds and parliament also has no authority to extend the term of the president, because the constitution has not permitted the parliament to do so; therefore, this step has made parliament go against the constitution. When parliament

acts against the constitution, this leaves no meaning for any constitutional and legal actions.

The writer also suggests that approving the draft resolution of extending the president's term for two years somewhat displays force and violence, in order to give legitimacy to an action which has no rightfulness or legality. The anonymous author also says that "some legal persons (i.e. the MPs), performed an illegal action, whereas they are not allowed to do so by law". Moreover, he/she states that this illegal action will violate and harm the political process, social values and the government's credibility among the people because parliament has lost its legal status after approving an illegal resolution for extending the presidential term, which eventually means that all official bodies lose their legal status.

The sentences suggest that MPs have acted against the constitution, which is the fundamental basis of governing. This means that not only the president, but also parliament is illegitimate. As such, when the president and parliament are not legitimate, the government also loses its legitimacy and this shows that the country is having a profound crisis of legitimacy.

This theme was focused on in other articles also. In an article published on 9th July 2013 entitled '*Wehmî zorîneyi perlemanî*' (The illusion of the parliamentary majority) (Herdî, 2013b), the author condemns extending the presidential term and compares both the PUK and KDP with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt for drafting a constitution only for their own favour. He emphasises that both ruling parties in the Kurdistan region have extended the term of the president for two more years in a very illegal manner, whereas the current president has been in this position for eight years and has ended his term. Rêbîn Herdî the author of this article also expresses his belief that it is likely the president has lost thousands of votes during his term of ruling. By comparing the ruling parties in the Kurdistan region with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, the author aims to show that the PUK and the KDP are demonstrating an improper model of rule. Additionally, when he says that the president is likely to have lost a lot of votes during his ruling term, he is attempting to explain that the president has had many defects during his previous ruling term, therefore he does not deserve to be president again and even the majority of the people would reject him if a new election was held.

Once again, an anonymous author, in an article entitled '*Dîktator û rûdaw û rûtibunewe*' (Dictator, event and emptiness) (Awene, 2013d) posted on the news site on 13th July 2013, and stated that after the coup of 30th June the president no longer has any legitimacy. The author first explains what legitimacy means and then argues that this process is not only a legal issue, but it is related to the people's decision: "it is the people who decide who has legitimacy and who has not". In another paragraph, the author writes:

For me, what happened on 30th June was the moment of the emergence of a hidden truth for all of us. It was important for me to declare loudly that henceforth, the president has no legitimacy.

Other authors also describe the action of parliament, by approving the resolution of extending the presidential term, as a coup as another expression for referring to the fact that the president is no longer legitimate because the procedure of appointing him was not legal and came through a coup. For example, in the article '*Kudeta: dwaneyi hêzu yasa*' (Coup: the twin of force and law) (Awene, 2013c) an anonymous author states that if the coup of 30th June relies on force, this creates instability in society. In the same way, in the article, '*Çma dekrê le sî hûzeyran bêdeng bîn?*' (Is it possible to keep silent about 30th of June?) ('Ebdulla, 2013a) Huşiyar 'Ebdulla calls this action a coup several times to emphasise the illegitimacy of the process. For instance, he introduces his article by stating that the extension of the presidential term was done through a parliamentary coup illegally. It is valuable to note that the concept of a coup has a detestable history in Iraq, including the Kurdish region, and when people hear this word, immediately imagine the illegal seizure of power through resorting to the use of force, as happened several times in Baghdad. Therefore, when a writer describes the extension of the presidential term as a coup, this is considered a serious criticism and an accusation of the ruling elite and parties.

8.4.2 Dictatorship authority

This is one of the themes mentioned frequently in the opinion articles where they compare the president and the ruling parties of the Kurdistan region with some totalitarian regimes and dictators, such as Saddam Hussain, Adolf Hitler, Stalin and Hosni Mubarak, calling them non-democratic and dictators. This is considered a serious criticism. An article entitled '*Aya çarenûsî Hûsinî Mubarek helldebijêrin?*' (Do you choose the fate of Hosni Mubarak?) (Herdî, 2013a), first describes how Hosni Mubarak

resorted to the use of violence and election fraud to guarantee another presidential term, and then it compares Mubarak with the Kurdish ruling parties, stating that they are the same and the Kurdish ruling parties will also resort to everything from violence to other improper means to remain in power. According to the article, these two examples are very similar and both Kurdish ruling parties and the president of the Kurdistan region seem to choose the same destiny of Hosni Mubarak and his regime. The author also writes that the ruling elite of the Kurdistan region has not learned the lesson from the Arab spring, whereby resorting to violence and suppression will only extend their rule for a while and not forever, because people stand against them. The article concludes that in the Kurdistan region all of the military and security forces are loyal only to the president and the ruling parties. Through comparing the situation of Kurdistan with that in Egypt and other Arab countries, this writer sends some key critical messages, such as the region is ruled by a dictator, there will be a revolution against the ruling parties and, as a result, they will be displaced and sent to jail. The author overtly challenges the ruling parties and the president saying to them; you cannot rule the country forever because the people will refuse this through various means.

The same theme was focused on in '*Kudeta: dwaneyi hêzu yasa*' (Coups: the twin of force and law) (Awene, 2013c). The author compares the situation in the Kurdistan region with the ruling era of both Stalin and Saddam Hussain in terms of resorting to the use of force. The anonymous author states that what happened in parliament was the use of force against the law, which reminds us of Stalin's and Saddam's eras, where they used force to achieve their aims. In another paragraph, the author suggests that in Kurdish society, since there is not a proper relationship between power and the law, force has become the means of ruling the country. In the author's opinion, the political system in the Kurdistan region is totalitarian and there is no difference between the ruling parties of the Kurdistan region and Saddam Hussain or Stalin in terms of resorting to anything, including the use of force to remain in power.

The same comparison occurs in some sentences of another article. The author of '*Wehmî zorîneyî perlemanî*' (The illusion of a parliamentary majority) (Herdî, 2013b) illustrates what democracy is and how it works, elaborating in the meantime on how dictators try to achieve power through elections. He mentions the Nazis and Hitler as one of the worst models of ruling, as they came to power through elections and

people's votes, but soon destroyed all of the democratic system institutions and established instead a severe totalitarian regime, which became a symbol of mass killing, genocide and suppression. Then, he explains that some countries in the Middle East and other emerging societies are repeating the same experience, where some parties come to power through elections, but they soon turn to dictators because they believe that they have won the people's votes forever and do everything they can to remain in power. The author finally comes to his main point of the criticism, stating:

One of the most prominent mistakes of the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt and the two ruling parties of the Kurdistan region is that they have the same vision of power. They believe that democracy means winning the majority of parliament's seats, which authorise them to decide, rule the country alone and do whatever they want for their own favour (Herdî, 2013b).

These sentences express serious criticism towards the president and the ruling parties of the Kurdistan region, accusing them of being similar to the Nazis, and just like other regimes in the Middle East, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, which came to power through elections and turned to totalitarianism, resorting to every means to remain in power. When a writer compares his country's president and ruling parties to the Nazis and Hitler, he is stating that he no longer feels his country is democratic, because undemocratic procedures are being taken in the country to impose a president – the most significant and prominent political and administrative position.

Another author expresses his critical opinion on the situation in the Kurdistan region in the aftermath, extending the presidential term through parliament and stresses that undoubtedly the political system of Iraqi Kurdistan is a dictatorship. Bextiyar 'Elî the author of '*Xo gêlkrdin wek stîratîj*' (Playing dumb as a strategy) ('Elî, 2013) believes that it is a serious problem if a Kurdish intellectual can still doubt the existence and continuity of a dictatorship in Kurdistan after the action of parliament on 30th June 2013.

Similarly, this theme was focused on in '*Ew kateyi siyaset bênrîx dekrêt*' (Making the politics worthless) (Hemkol, 2013). Rewa Birrwa Hemkol, the writer of the article, considers what happened in parliament on 30th June as a message from both ruling parties, the PUK and KDP, that changing them and the president of the Kurdistan region is impossible. Then he mentions that through history, dictators have considered

themselves as everlasting regimes, but they can never withstand for a long period of time. He adds:

The regimes of Hosni Mubarak, Qaddafi, Saddam, Stalin and Hitler although had a common point which was they considered themselves as the last, everlasting and unchangeable regimes, but they were not able to withstand in front of the dream of change (Hemkol, 2013).

He concludes the article by calling both ruling parties, the PUK and KDP, totalitarian parties and states that it is very important henceforth not to expect anything from either party because no totalitarian party can provide openness and democracy to its surrounding environment. He also thinks it is unlikely that the ruling parties can play any positive role in democratising because, as he says, they are totalitarian parties.

Another author describes the ruling system in the Kurdistan region as non-democratic, through explaining that in democratic countries the president is usually elected by people for a specific period of time, while the time that happened in Kurdistan's parliament was a crisis. In the article '*Serokayetî emirîka wek rênmayiyek bo serokî herêma*' (The presidency of the United States as a guide to the president of the Kurdistan region) (Sallîh, 2013), the author also points out that parliament, instead of achieving consensus in the political process, has become a part of the crisis. Rêbwar Rewf Sallîh writes about the US's presidents who all committed to the legal terms of the presidency, suggesting in the meantime, for the president of the Kurdistan region to implicitly do the same.

Similarly, the author of '*Wehmî zorîneyî perlemanî*' (The illusion of the parliamentary majority) (Herdî, 2013b) points out that the political system of the Kurdistan region is not democratic, because in the perspective of real democratic systems, democracy does not only involve conducting elections and winning the majority of voices, but it also expands political participations and prevents monopolising power in the hands of a person or a group. Through these sentences, the author is revealing that power in Kurdistan has been monopolised by specific persons and groups, that are not democratic and do not understand the principles of democracy and how a democratic system should function.

8.4.3 Corruption

The theme of corruption was mentioned frequently in these articles and in different ways. Several authors, when discussing the subject of the extension of the presidential

term, reminded us of or referred to corruption, including injustice issues and illegal exploitation of public funds that the ruling and political elite are involved in. One of these authors is Asos Herdî, who points out in '*Aya çarenûsî Hûsinî Mubarek helldebijêrin?*' (Do you choose the fate of Hosni Mubarak?) (Herdî, 2013a) that one of the things that the ruling parties will resort to for ensuring they remain in power, is misusing the public budget and institutions to buy votes, as occurred previously in elections in the Kurdistan region. The author sends a message through these sentences that the ruling parties and their influential figures are corrupt because they exploit the public budget for buying voters' loyalty, a widespread phenomenon during elections. Therefore, the author also wants to make another point, which is that the ruling parties will never win elections if they misuse public money for their own good.

In another article entitled '*Çma dekrav dekrê le sî hûzeyran bêdeng bîn?*' (Is it possible to keep silent about 30th of June?) ('Ebdulla, 2013a), corruption issues are again addressed. Huşiyar 'Ebdulla reminds us of the many corruption cases of the ruling elite, asserting in the meantime that as they did not remain silent about oil smuggling and looting the public budget, they will also not remain silent about the 30th of June, where the presidential extension was approved by parliament, and states that this is a stain on the forehead of a greedy and corrupt group. In other sections, the author accuses some of the influential figures of the PUK as accepting the extension of the presidential term to keep their senior positions and to get more financial benefits. He also states that for financial benefits, those influential figures are not expected to do anything, but be ready to extend the presidential term for Barzani not only for two more years, but even for 20 years. The author concludes by defying the political elite and stating that since looting of the wealth, misuse of power and killing people is an ongoing process, the people will continue in their civil struggle against them. In the same way, in '*Ew kateyi siyaset bênrîx dekrêt*' (Making politics worthless) (Hemkol, 2013), the author refers to corruption as a characteristic of the ruling elite. The writer explicitly considers the ruling parties and the president of the Kurdistan region corrupt and criticises many influential politicians from the ruling parties that they seem ready to abandon everything for the sake of money and personal interest.

8.4.4 Call to take a stand

Several authors have demanded that people, media outlets, opposition and even ruling parties take a stand against the action of parliament. Kawe Muḥemed, the writer of an article entitled '*Be daxewe*' (What a pity) (Muḥemed, 2013) calls members and supporters of the PUK, whatever their positions, to stand and raise their voices against the political deal of their party's senior officials that extended the presidential term. He explains the importance of taking such a stand in order to prevent the abandonment of democracy and violation of the principles and fundamental programmes of their party. In the author's opinion, these voices, perhaps eventually will lead a rescue for the party from its awful condition, where some of the members of the PUK's political bureau run the party however they wish, causing a reduction in the role of the party. It is important to note that calling members of a specific party in the Kurdistan region, such as the PUK which has its own security forces, to turn against their leadership is considered a serious risk that may lead to severe consequences; however, the author manifestly called for such action and expressed his opinion.

The article '*Bo Sê serkrdekeyi opozsiyon: êwe pêşmankewn ême bedwatanda dêyin*' (To the three opposition leaders: be at the forefront and we follow you) (Sergellwîy, 2013), written by Kemal Heme Sergelluwîy, focuses mainly on this theme and calls the leadership of the opposition parties, people, intellectuals and other segments of society to go on to the streets and conduct demonstrations to reject the extension of the presidential term. In his article, the author writes:

Who are expected to take a stand at this moment are the opposition parties, prominent intellectuals and law experts which constitute the well-informed classes of society. The most expected parties to take a stand are the opposition parties; Gorran (Change Movement), Komell (Kurdistan Islamic Group), Yekgirtû (Kurdistan Islamic Union) and Ayinde (Kurdistan Future Party) and their leaderships (Sergellwîy, 2013).

He also argues that citizens are waiting for a stand from these leaders, to go to the streets leading mass demonstrations to reject the illegal rule of the two families (means Barzani and Talabani families) and the selfish rule of the PUK and KDP in general. The author further comments that he is not calling for demonstrations that last long, but for a one-day mass protest that makes the leadership of both ruling parties regret their extension of the presidential term. Moreover, he describes demonstrations as the most powerful weapon of oppressed people in the new Middle

East after 2011, stressing in the meantime that the opposition leaders should be at the forefront, so they can tell the ruling elite that the people all together hold the same stand against their illegal actions. The author concludes his article by announcing to opposition leaders that it is time for them to lead demonstrations and the people will follow them. It seems that the main purpose of this article is to conduct demonstrations similar to those conducted in some Arab countries, such as Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen that made their presidents step down. The author hopes to overthrow the ruling elite as happened in these countries. This means that the author calls for a revolution against the political system of the Kurdistan region in which everyone participates. Such a revolution could have serious consequences of instability in all aspects of life.

In the same way, in '*Kudeta: dwaneyi hêzu yasa*' (Coups: the twin of force and law) (Awene, 2013c), the author calls for a mass stand against the resolution to extend the presidential term because as the anonymous author states, this action has shocked the majority of people, therefore, it must be faced.

8.4.5 Violation of human rights

This includes authorities' attempts to silence journalists, suppress people, physical eliminations, neglecting the votes of the people and election fraud. This theme was mentioned by several authors and in many sentences and paragraphs. For instance, an article entitled '*Tendrustî siyaset bo wlatêkî tendrust*' (A healthy policy for a healthy country) ('Ebdulla, 2013b) states that officials in the Kurdistan region have a wide range of self-expression options and their opinions sometimes become law and order, while ordinary citizens are deprived even from demonstration, rallying and voting. Besides, he argues that the Kurdish senior officials have the best healthcare anywhere they want in the world, whereas ordinary citizens have no choice but to accept the poor health system in the Kurdistan region. In another section, Goran 'Ebdulla, the author of this article, further writes that in light of extending the presidential term and postponing elections, this could be considered looting and stealing people's rights from participation in decision making and evaluating the political and health systems in the country. The writer clarifies that ordinary citizens are deprived of many rights such as free expression, demonstration, voting, proper healthcare and participation in

decision making, which constitutes a critical accusation to the ruling elite in the region of violating citizens' rights.

The same theme was focused on in '*Ew kateyi siyaset bênrî dekrêt*' (Making the politics worthless) (Hemkol, 2013). The author considers what happened on 30th June 2013 as not a shock and as something to be expected, because the ruling elite have done worse than this, such as killing journalists, shooting people during the demonstrations of 17th February 2011 and igniting civil war. He further states that the 30th of June only proved once again that the ruling parties do not have the ability to converse with people, but instead they are ready to kill those who even dream about a new world. From the author's perspective, extending the presidential term is a simple issue and should not shock people when compared with the crimes done by some senior officials against people's rights. It seems that the author considers most senior officials to be criminals, because they have participated in many crimes such as killing people, civil war and many others.

Similarly, the author of '*Çma dekrê dekrê le şî hûzeyran bêdeng bîn?*' (Is it possible to keep silent about 30th of June?) ('Ebdulla, 2013a), reminds of the killing and detaining of several protesters on 17th February 2011, and of journalists for their work. The author states that just as they did not remain silent regarding the killing of those journalists and protesters, they will not remain silent towards the extension of the presidential term. The author, by reminding of the killings of journalists and protesters, wants to remind that human rights are being violated in the country and the authorities are responsible for all of these violations and crimes.

Once again, Asos Herdî in his article '*Aya çarenûsê Hûsinê Mubarek heldebijêrin?*' (Do you choose the fate of Hosni Mubarak?) (Herdî, 2013a) criticises and accuses the authorities for violation against voters' rights – fraud in elections. He states that after extending the presidential term, all of the signs suggest that the ruling parties will carry out fraud in the election as occurred previously. The author warns that the authorities are prepared to carry out fraud in elections, and wants to send a message to everyone, especially local and international organisations to be aware of such attempts.

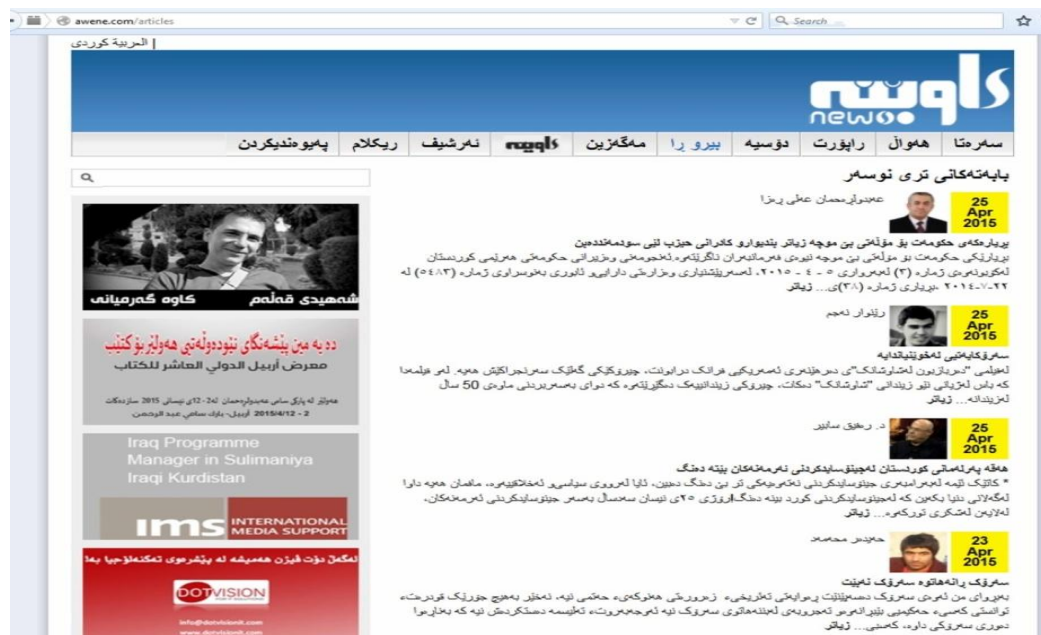


Figure 16: Opinion section of Awêne online news site (Awene.com/articles)

8.5 Summary

All of the articles, whether written by known or anonymous authors, were published online and seen by numerous audiences. They not only contain serious critical opinions, but also serious accusations. Many accuse the supreme powers, especially the president, parliament, the senior officials of the ruling parties (the PUK and KDP), who all have absolute power, with serious accusations of being dictatorial, totalitarian, corrupt, illegitimate, unjust, murderers of journalists and protestors, immoral, non-democratic and much more. Additionally, some of the authors explicitly or implicitly call people to take action to conduct demonstrations to refuse the political system and the president's new term. Such calls may lead to tension in the region and affect all aspects of life. Overall, these criticisms and accusations of the power elite published through this independent online news site (*Awene.com*), outline a terrible situation in the Kurdistan region, unlike what the authorities and ruling parties have claimed in their media outlets over the past years of development in the region. These criticisms are too severe for the Kurdish emerging democracy, where people until recently were not used to hearing such criticisms openly, especially in terms of comparing the president and other senior political actors in the region to Saddam Hussain and other dictators. The ruling political parties still have military forces and secret security bodies.

In response to these criticisms and others from other media outlets, the ruling parties, in particular the KDP, as headed by Masoud Barzani the president of the

Kurdistan region, resorted to their affiliated media outlets to publish various media and journalism productions in the same period, including opinion articles on their official central online news site (*kdp.info*).²² This included opinion articles which completely or partially address the subject of the extension of the presidential term (Şwanî, 2013a; Şwanî, 2013b; Şwanî, 2013c), and stressed the legitimacy of the process. Other articles criticised the actions and attitudes of the opposition parties and their leaders, accusing them of being anarchist and non-patriotic (Hesen, 2013), while other articles praised the role of the president Barzani in terms of being democratic, tolerant, achieving many gains for his country and his struggles for the self-determination of the Kurdish people (Cebelî, 2013).

8.6 Conclusion

This chapter provided an understanding of how and to what extent online journalism has influenced freedom of speech in the case of the Kurdistan region. The opinion articles analysed contain severe criticisms and accusations of the most powerful leaders and political parties in the Kurdistan region. All articles were posted on an independent online news site during a critical period and were seen by the public. Furthermore, until the present time they can be found and read on the online news site. It is also valuable to note that none of the authors or the staff of the online news site have been threatened or punished by the authorities or the ruling party's militant or security forces for openly writing and posting these articles. Even though all articles contained disapproval and condemnation of the extension of the presidential term and serious criticism of the most powerful politicians in the region, the interviewees – the Kurdish journalists, academics and media trainers – who constitute the most relevant persons to this case study, all have a common perspective and agree that online journalism has helped in promoting freedom of expression. There are several reasons for this, in particular, a lack of the authorities' control over the Internet, the lack of a special law for dealing with online journalism cases, anonymity, and the nature and features of the web, as explained earlier in this chapter.

To conclude, the evidence in this chapter has shown that in an emerging society such as the Kurdish one (which inherited a profound legacy of the dictatorship era and which has conservative traditions), online journalism has helped in promoting freedom

22- Kdp.info is the central and official online news site of the KDP founded in March 2011.

of expression through providing a space to the various voices to be presented online and enabling them to criticise openly. While most of the mainstream media outlets in the Kurdistan region, and which need substantial financial support, are operated and funded either openly or covertly by the political parties and/or senior political actors, it is difficult for most critical opinions and views of writers and even ordinary citizens to be expressed and presented openly through them.

The owners of these mainstream media outlets have common political and economic interests with the authorities, or they are part of the political system; therefore, they have specific policies for their media outlets that are in line with the interests of the government and the political ruling parties. Besides, mainstream media outlets are usually controlled by a number of gatekeepers and journalists (Stein, 2008), who make further barriers to publishing free opinions. Whereas in the case of online journalism, even small independent media bodies and ordinary citizens can establish and operate websites because of low costs and the ease of use and access, and the gatekeepers, if found, are much fewer than in the case of mainstream media (Balkin, 2004, p. 7-8). Thus online journalism transcends several traditional barriers and authorities' controls that mainstream media experience (Ang and Nadarajan, 2013; Curran, 2012, p.8-12). Accordingly, it provides an affordable medium for various opinions to be expressed openly (Curran, 2012, p. 13; Murdoch, 2006; Zittel, 2004, p. 79; Perez, 2004, 136-137). This is significant, especially in an emerging democracy such as the Kurdistan region because online journalism constitutes an important alternative media outlet for critical opinions that oppose the authorities and the political elite to be expressed openly.

Neither the authorities, nor the KDP (which is a ruling party, is headed by the president of the Kurdistan region and has private military forces and security bodies), responded to the authors of the critical articles of the case study, or to the staff of the *Awene* online news site by physical means or threats to them. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the researcher found that in the same period as this case study, the KDP resorted to its affiliated media outlets to respond to all criticisms relating to the extension of the presidential term. One of these media outlets is *kdp.info*, the official and central online news site of the KDP, which in response published several opinion articles praising the president's role and character considering the extension of his

term as a legislative process and also accusing the opposition parties of being non-democratic, anarchist and others.

As such, when people in the Kurdistan region are allowed to criticise the authorities openly, this means that freedom of expression exists and this has been facilitated by the Internet because, as noted, only since the proliferation and the development of websites, has such severe critical opinion, by writers and ordinary citizens of the authorities, including the pinnacle of power in the Kurdistan region, been heard publicly. However, this does not mean that there is no violation. Several journalists and writers have been threatened and even murdered for publishing criticism and free opinions openly, either before or in the aftermath of this case study period, as shown in Chapter 5 of this research.

Chapter 9: Conclusions and recommendations

9.1 Conclusions

This study has investigated and identified several aspects of the Kurdish media in the past and present. It showed, in Chapter Two, that the media in the Kurdistan region has experienced phases of ebb and flow, and has encountered difficult conditions, because of external factors such as censorship and prevention of the Kurdish press by the central government of Baghdad. There have also been internal barriers, for example, the high levels of illiteracy among the Kurds, poverty, lack of skills and an unstable political situation. However, what has helped with the continuation of the Kurdish press throughout the decades of the twentieth century is national motivation, such as making people aware of their rights and confronting oppression of Iraq's different governments, supporting Kurdish revolutions and struggles, reminding of the tragedies of the Kurdish people and motivating people to learn and educate themselves. Therefore, as seen from Chapter Two of this study, the Kurdish media is strongly associated with Kurdish national movements, which have relied largely on press and radio stations to be in touch with the people, to influence them and raise national awareness.

On the other hand, even when Iraqi governments prevented or censored Kurdish periodicals, the Kurds did not give up and resorted to alternative ways to overcome the government's suppression. For instance, they resorted to circulating their periodicals clandestinely in the cities that were under the control of the Iraqi government. In the same way, in the mountainous areas where the strongholds of the Kurdish political parties and their armed forces were found, a style of Kurdish media known as the mountainous press, was found, which was also circulated in the cities covertly. The latter included periodicals and a number of radio stations that were circulated and operated by Kurdish political parties. This clandestine media was characterised by poor quality because of a lack of skills or sophisticated equipment, such as printing presses or radio transmitter devices. Moreover, Kurdish intellectuals and political parties also resorted to publishing periodicals in the diaspora, where a significant number of Kurds live, out of the sight and reach of the Iraqi authorities who were imposing many restrictions on the Kurdish press. It should also be noted that

besides the Kurdish language, they also resorted to using other languages for their periodicals, especially English and Arabic, and they concentrated on nationalist subjects by showing the sufferings of the Kurdish people. Furthermore, as indicated by this study, the Kurdish uprising of 1991 against the Ba'athist regime, brought fundamental changes and a prosperous era for the Kurdish media, where clandestine periodicals began to circulate overtly in many big Kurdish cities, and numerous new periodicals, radio stations and terrestrial TV stations were founded, mainly by the political parties who had the financial support. In terms of the emergence of satellite broadcasts and Internet services in the Kurdistan region, it took time and only in 1999 was the first Iraqi Kurdish satellite TV (Kurdistan TV) broadcast, and Internet services provided in some Internet cafes. The domination of the political parties over media scenes in the region was absolute until 2000, when the first independent newspaper, *Hawllatî* (citizen), was circulated by *Renc* printing house. This was considered a turning point in media working styles in the region, as it brought a critical media discourse and attempted a functioning watchdog role over the ruling system.

The removal of the dictatorial regime in 2003, by the western coalition, led to openness towards the world and to significant developments in the political and economic scenes, which helped to further progress the media sector in the Kurdistan region. Consequently, further media outlets were founded by the private sector and political opposition parties emerged by 2009, which established their own media channels such as satellite TV, radio, online news sites and printed newspapers. The stability of the economic, political and security situation of the Kurdistan region also motivated significant investment in the region from international and local companies in various sectors, including Internet services. As such, the number of Internet users increased and online journalism became another influential media medium in the region. In effect, almost all traditional media outlets resorted to creating their own websites to keep up with the new era of journalism, and numerous new websites were also established either by media bodies, individuals, companies, government institutions or by civil society groups. Overall, following 2003, media in Iraq saw an improvement in terms of diversity, since during Saddam Hussein's rule only the Ba'athist party was allowed to operate media outlets. Nowadays, the new Iraqi constitution encourages freedom of speech and media work. To an extent, the country

has witnessed media improvement with the emergence of new mass media outlets; however, media work is still risky and dangerous and even life threatening. As detailed in Chapter Four of this thesis, the threats to journalists come from various sources in Iraq, including interest groups, religious and tribal groups, political parties, extremist gangs, terrorist groups and even from government seniors. All of these groups have taken advantage of the general political and security deterioration in order to target journalists and media outlets. Moreover, these offenders nearly always go unpunished. The Iraqi government is dominated by sectarian beliefs and is, therefore, unable to reduce threats to journalists. On the other hand, in the Kurdistan region, many reforms and modifications have been made to laws and some new laws have been issued, fuelled by the government and NGOs. However, the dominant culture of societal violence still poses an impediment to human rights, in particular, concerning media work and women's rights, whereby women and journalists are still subjected to violence and even death.

Furthermore, Chapter Five of this study showed that mass media is considered the most important instrument for consolidating democracy in transforming societies; however, a free media, in societies with an authoritarian past, often faces challenges from various sources. Interests and ambitions of the political and power elite, economic blocs, corrupted journalists, religion and societal groups all affect mass media scenes by creating various barriers (Voltmer, 2008, p.26; Krasnoboka, 2002, p.483). Media in the Kurdistan region suffers from the bulk of these problems, similar to the media transition in any other emerging democracies. In Kurdish society, as demonstrated by examples, various problems from dominant religious and tribal beliefs/traditions affect the media, as well as problems inflicted by the political powers and economic blocs, which pose serious barriers to the development of the media in the Kurdistan region. To an extent, steps have been taken by ruling system in terms of legislation for the media; however, these steps are not effectively reflected as the new legislation still needs further modifications, and these are not implemented successfully by the judiciary, the executive powers, or because of the politicisation of the civil society organisations. In general, the most prominent barriers to the media in the Kurdistan region, as outlined in this study are: (1) unhealthy relationships between journalists and political figures, (2) political interference, (3) physical assaults and rival

media, (4) non-implementation of laws related to media, (5) lack of access to information, (6) financial problems, low circulation and advertisements, (7) absence of a unified written language, (8) copyright violation and (9) lack of skills among journalists. Consequently, urgent action is needed in order to improve media conditions, especially with regards to monitoring the implementation of the laws passed by parliament, creating a national unified standard written language, reforming the judicial system, guaranteeing the equal distribution of government advertisements, guaranteeing access to information and ensuring safety for journalists.

Equally important, the police and other state forces should be educated and familiarised with the appropriate and proper ways of dealing with journalists, in order to allow them to legally and safely conduct their work, particularly in times of conflict and demonstrations, so that the elements of a democratic society can be enhanced. It is difficult for the Kurdish media to overcome many of these problems, since the power elite still retain a legacy led by substantial political and economic interests, which confront the free media work; therefore, further efforts by media producers and journalists are needed so that society in the region, in general, can overcome this legacy. Besides, the Kurdish mass media, especially the independent media, needs to focus more on specific aspects in order to withstand these difficulties. It is important for journalists to focus on professionalism, credibility and impartiality in their work so they can be independent and maintain their audience by truly and independently reporting the different aspects within their society.

Chapter Five of this study also revealed that independent media in the Kurdistan region, despite the many obstacles, has a significant presence in the media landscape and for many Kurdish audiences it is still a reliable source of information, since this media usually functions in the middle of the media discourse of the opposition and authority. Additionally, most of the independent media outlets comprise of online news sites and printed periodicals, as these forms of media outlets require less financial input and, unlike TV and radio stations, do not need licences.

The additional findings of this study suggest that the spread of the Internet in the Kurdistan region has created a source of information and a medium for participation for numerous people. From the literature reviewed in Chapter Six, it can be noted that the Internet, with its unique features that allow easy access, use, communication and

interaction on many levels, raises a hope among many scholars that it will become a proper tool for creating and enhancing the public sphere compared to traditional mass media outlets. Currently, it has become a significant tool for communication and media, where all actors whether political movements, different cultures or ethnic groups in the world want to exploit it for their own favours and agendas, and thus it is a supportive forum for the public sphere (Dahlgern, 2006, p. 106). However, as Chapter Six of this study has identified, since the Internet also has some barriers, it cannot be the utopian medium for the democratic public sphere. But, when it is compared to the traditional mass media, the former is considered supportive to expand possibilities for the majority of people to participate much more freely and easily in political debate and in talking about various issues of common interest, because it reduces the control and role of the media owners and editors. It provides new avenues for dialogue and debate away from the restrictions of traditional mass media outlets, whether these are held by authoritarian regimes or by media owners and it restructures public discourse in a way that offers individuals a greater autonomy and say in their governance than traditional mass media ever allowed:

The Internet does restructure public discourse in ways that give individuals a greater say in their governance than the mass media made possible. The Internet does provide avenues of discourse around the bottlenecks of older media, whether these are held by authoritarian governments or by media owners (Benkler, 2006, p.271).

The characteristics that make the Internet a better medium than traditional mass media are many, in particular: anonymity, interactivity, affordability, easy access and users' greater role in publishing (Gerhards and Schäfer, 2010, p. 12-13; Balkin, 2008, p. 440-441; Benkler, 2006, p. 30-212; Papacharissi, 2004, p. 16).

For Kurdish society, the Internet is the most significant medium enabling people to participate in debates about common issues, since the vast majority of the mass media outlets are still owned and dominated by the political parties, which has made it difficult for ordinary citizens' opinions to be presented in these outlets. However, in this society, it is not the perfect medium for producing a public sphere, especially on account of access problems that may reduce equal opportunities for everyone.

This study also shows that online journalism in the Kurdistan region is a growing trend in media work, where different types of online sites try to provide services in

different fields and languages; however, it also has many barriers. These obstacles, as detailed in Chapter Seven, and which are widespread in countries with emerging democracies, vary between professional, technical, legal and financial issues, and some are obstacles common to both traditional and online media, while others only relate to online. For example, technical barriers such as poor Internet services, hacking threats, lack of skills of using the web and poor designs relate purely to online journalism, whereas most of the professional issues such as bias, lack of objectivity, absence of a unified written language, lack of finance, lack of access to information and safety also exist in traditional media. Moreover, there is uncertainty in dealing with online abuse such as defamation, privacy intrusion and others because most audiences and even journalists themselves are unsure whether such issues are dealt with by existing laws, or whether there should be a special law for regulating online offences.

Furthermore, the findings from the thematic analysis of the opinion articles of the chosen online news site show that the most powerful leaders and political parties in the Kurdistan region have been severely criticised by various voices. All of these articles have been posted online during a critical period and have been seen by the public, and they can still be found and read online on the online news site. None of these writers or the staff of the online news site have been punished or threatened for these opinions, which means a space for freedom of speech exists on online news sites. The information collected from interviews suggests that online journalism, compared to other forms of media, is much more supportive of freedom of speech in the Kurdistan region and provides more space for people to express their opinions. According to the perspectives of interviewees, many reasons can be found for the help online journalism has received in supporting freedom of speech in Kurdish society, in particular, evading censorship and the control of authority, the lack of a gatekeeper role, the lack of legal responsibilities, the ease of accessing website publications and autonomy in publishing for users.

Therefore, this study has suggested that in an emerging society such as the Kurdish one, which inherited a profound legacy from a dictatorship era, online journalism has played a significant role in helping promote freedom of speech through providing a space for various voices and opinions to be presented online. However, this is not possible through the mainstream mass media outlets, as they need substantial

financial support and as such are strongly linked to and dominated by the political parties or political actors. The owners of these mainstream media outlets usually have common political and economic interests with the authorities, or they are a part of the political system; therefore, they have specific policies for their media outlets that are in line with the interests of the government and the political ruling parties. Additionally, unlike online sites, mainstream media outlets are controlled by a number of gatekeepers, who make even more barriers to the publishing of free and critical opinions. As such, it is difficult for serious critical opinions and views of writers and ordinary citizens to be expressed and presented openly through them. Whereas, in contrast, in the case of online media, even small independent media bodies, individuals and ordinary citizens can establish and operate websites because of the low cost, the ease of use and access, and where the gatekeepers, if found, are much less influential than in the case of mainstream media. This is significant, especially in an emerging democracy such as the Kurdistan region, because online journalism constitutes an important alternative media outlet so that critical opinions that oppose the authorities and the political elite can be expressed openly.

However, it also should be noted that despite these improvements, as this study indicated in Chapter Five, Kurdish journalists and ordinary citizens still encounter violence for publishing critical opinions and reports about corruption, which sometimes even results in their death. This requires urgent procedures and steps from the KRG and the Kurdistan parliament to protect the right to freedom of speech and media work through activating and implementing existing regulations and reforming the judicial system. This is vital because, as clarified in Chapter Five of this study, most of the suspects of these crimes have impunity and go without punishment. Finally, to summarise, the findings from this study show that online journalism in the Kurdistan region, despite experiencing many barriers, has supported freedom of speech and people's participation in political debate. However, since media scenes, including online journalism have many fundamental barriers that are explored in this study, its impact is still limited.

9.2 Recommendations

As a subject for future study, it would be valuable to investigate the impact of online journalism in promoting freedom of expression in Kurdish society during different

periods and on various subjects. Because study over a longer period of time and within other subjects would provide a more thorough evaluation of the role of online journalism in this aspect. Moreover, the findings of this research are mainly based on qualitative content analysis and in-depth interviews with journalists, media academics and trainers. Despite the strengths and advantages of these two methods, the conducting of a survey may offer further understanding about the relationship between online journalism and the public sphere, barriers to online journalism and its role in enhancing freedom of speech.

Besides, as this study analysed the contents of opinion articles of an online news site, to verify what Kurdish online news sites tell us about the role of online journalism in Kurdistan, it would also be interesting to analyse the content of opinion articles from other online news sites. This would provide a better insight into the role of online journalism in Kurdish society.

Furthermore, this research has not made comparisons between independent online news sites and political party affiliated online news sites in Kurdistan's society. For future study, conducting such a comparison may provide a better and comprehensive insight into the role and influences of these online news sites in this society.

Moreover, the researcher stopped data collection in September 2014; only three months after the rise of Da'esh (IS) in Iraq. Da'esh militants seized large portions of Iraqi territory and this created a new situation in this country, including the Kurdistan region. This new situation may have an influence on media channels in the Kurdistan region, particularly in terms of the limits of free expression, speech and ethics. Therefore, more work of this type needs to be conducted in order to investigate the new circumstances of the media in light of these changes. It would also be interesting to analyse how these new events are being reflected in online journalism and explore the limits of free expression after these changes.

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Appendix 1: Iraqi Kurdish periodicals from 1910 to March 1991

Iraqi Kurdish periodicals issued from 1910-1919:

	Title	Dates	Place of Issue	Type	Language (s)	Status	Total
1	Bangî kurd (The Call of the Kurd)	8 Feb. 1914-	Baghdad	magazine	Kurdish & Turkish	Public	5
2	Têgeyîstnî Rastî (understanding of the truth)	1 Jan. 1918-27 Jan. 1919	Baghdad	newspaper	Kurdish	Public	67

Iraqi Kurdish periodicals issued from 1920-1929:

	Title	Dates	Place of Issue	Type	Language (s)	Status	Total
1	Pêşkewtin (progress)	29 Apr. 1920-27 Jul. 1922	Sulaymaniyah	Newspaper	Kurdish	Public	118
2	Bangî Kurdistan (The Call of Kurdistan)	2 Aug. 1922-1926	Sulaymaniyah	Newspaper	Kurdish, Persian & Turkish	Public	17
3	Rojî Kurdistan (the day of Kurdistan)	15 Nov. 1922-3 Mar. 1923	Sulaymaniyah	Newspaper	Kurdish	Public	16
4	Bangî Heq (the cal of the right)	8 Mar. 1923-Apr. 1923	Sulaymaniyah_Casene	Newspaper	Kurdish	Clandestine	3
5	Umêdî Îstîqlal (the hope of Kurdistan)	20 Sep. 1923-27 Apr. 1924	Sulaymaniyah	Newspaper	Kurdish	Public	25
6	Jyanewe (rebirth)	18 Aug. 1924-14 Jan. 1926	Sulaymaniyah	Newspaper	Kurdish	Public	56
7	Dyarîy Kurdistan (Gift of Kurdistan)	11 Mar. 1925-11 May. 1926	Baghdad	Magazine	Kurdish, Arabic and Turkish	Public	16
8	Jyan (life)	21 Jan. 1926-10 Mar. 1938	Sulaymaniyah	Newspaper	Kurdish	Public	553
9	Zar Kirmancî (Kirmancî accent)	24 May 1926-23 Jul. 1932	Erbil- Rwandiz	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	24
10	Kirkuk (a city)	12 Oct. 1926-29 May 1931	Kirkuk	Newspaper	Turkish, Kurdish and Arabic	Public	354
11	Lawanî kurd (Kurdish youth)	1927	Baghdad	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	Few
12	Peyje (Lader)	1927	Baghdad	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	1

Iraqi Kurdish periodicals issued from 1930-1939:

	Title	Dates	Place of Issue	Type	Language (s)	Status	Total
1	Yadgarî Lawan (Dyarî Lawan) (The gift of youths)	1933-1934	Baghdad	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	2
2	Runakî (Light)	24 Oct. 1935-16 May 1936	Erbil	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	11
3	Zban (Language)	11 Sep. 1937-18 Jan. 1941	Sulaymaniyah	Newspaper	Kurdish	Public	94
4	Zansitî (scientific)	25 Feb. 1938	Sulaymaniyah	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	1

5	Gelawêj (daystar)	Jan. 1939	Baghdad	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	105
6	Jîn (Life)	26 Jan. 1939- 7 Feb. 1963	Sulaymaniyah	Newspaper	Kurdish	Public	1161
7	Kurdistan	1939-1940	Erbil- Rwandiz	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	5

Iraqi Kurdish periodicals issued from 1940-1949:

	Title	Dates	Place of Issue	Type	Language (s)	Status	Total
1	Xurmall (a town)	3 Jun. 1940- 24 Sep. 1940	Sulaymaniyah- Xurmall	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Public	24
2	Hîwa (Hope)	1941	Iraqi Kurdistan	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	?
3	Blêse (Blaze)	1941	Erbil	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	?
4	Nawbenaw (time to time)	1942	Baghdad	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Public	32
5	Dengî Mîllet (the voice of the people)	1943	Erbil	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	?
6	Azadî (freedom)	1942	Iraqi Kurdistan	Pamphlet	Kurdish	?	?
7	Taze pêgeyîştû	1942	Iraqi Kurdistan	Pamphlet	Kurdish	?	?
8	Baserre (name of a place)	25 Jun. 1942- 23 Oct. 1942	Kirkuk- Qadirkerem	Pamphlet	Kurdish	?	24
9	Blawkirdnewey Hefteyî Dengubas (publishing the news of the week)	6 Sep. 1942- 28 Oct. 1943	Baghdad	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Public	31
10	Dengî Gêti Taze (The Voice of the New World)	Oct. 1943- 1947	Baghdad	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	25
11	Govar (Magazine)	1943-	Erbil	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	?
12	Dengî Kurd (the voice of the Kurd)	1943	Erbil	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	3
13	Hellalle (a Kurdish name)	1943	Iraqi kurdistan	Pamphlet	Kurdish	?	?
14	Azadî (freedom)	Apr. 1944-26 Sep. 1961	Erbil	Newspaper	Kurdish	Clandestine (Public in 1959)	?
15	Dengî Rastî (the voice of the truth)	1944	Sulaymaniyah	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	2
16	Şîlan (a name)	1944-1945	Sulaymaniyah- Zerdaw village	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	?
17	Yekêtî Têkoşîn (struggle union)	1944-1945	Erbil	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	3
18	Zerdewille (bee)	1945	Sulaymaniyah	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	?
19	Rizgarî (deliverance)	1945-?	Iraqi Kurdistan	Newspaper	Kurdish	Clandestine	?
20	Şorrş (revolution)	1945	Erbil	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	Few
21	Çemçemall (a town)	1 Jul. 1946	Sulaymaniyah- Çemçemall	Pamphlet	Kurdish	public	7
22	Agaw Rûdawî Hefteyî (Weekly News and	1946-1953	Baghdad	Magazine	Kurdish	public	193

	Events)						
23	Rizgarî (deliverance)	2 Sep. 1946-1955	Baghdad, Sîtek & Kirkuk	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	Clandestine	?
24	Pişko	1945	Sulaymaniyah	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	Few
25	Dengî Gêtî Taze (the voice of the new world)	18 Nov. 1946-Aug. 1947	Baghdad	Newspaper	Kurdish	public	34
26	Êre Bexdaye (Huna Bexdad) (This is Baghdad)	1947-Jul. 1958	Baghdad	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	public	171
27	Nzar (jungle)	Mar. 1948- 15 Feb. 1949	Baghdad	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	public	22
28	Hetaw (sun)	11 Sep. 1948	Erbil	Newspaper	Kurdish	Public	1
29	Şu'le (torch)	?	Erbil	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	Clandestine	1
30	Dengî Felah (the voice of farmer)	1948- May 1950	Sulaymaniyah	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	?
31	Rencber (drudge)	1947	Kirkuk	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	Few
32	El-Sîfmanyê (a city)	Jun. 1948	Baghdad	Newspaper	Arabic	Public	11
33	Rega (road)	1948	Sulaymaniyah-Sîtek	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	1
34	Mrov (human)	1948	Iraqi kurdistan	Newspaper	Kurdish	Clandestine	Few
35	Têkoşanî Qutabyan (students struggle)	1948	Iraqi kurdistan	Magazine	Kurdish	?	Few
36	El-Necme (star)	1949	Sulaymaniyah	Pamphlet	Arabic	Clandestine	Few
37	Xebatman (our struggle)	1949	Baghdad	Pamphlet	Arabic	Clandestine	8
38	Agaw Rûdawî Hefteyî (Weekly News and Events)	Sep. 1949- 8 Jun. 1953	Baghdad	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	193
39	Bo Pêşewe (forward)	1949	Iraqi kurdistan	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	Few
40	El-Îtîhad (the union)	1949	Sulaymaniyah	Newspaper	Arabic	Clandestine	Few
41	Sîrwan (a name)	1949	Baghdad	Newspaper	Kurdish	?	Few

Iraqi Kurdish periodicals issued from 1950-1959:

	Title	Dates	Place of Issue	Type	Language (s)		Total
1	Hewlêr (a city)	16 Jan. 1950-28 Dec. 1953	Erbil	Newspaper	Kurdish& Arabic	public	140
2	Akrê (a town)	15 Jul. 1950-15 Sep. 1950	Akrê	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Public	10
3	Helmet (campaign)	1951	Iraqi kurdistan	Magazine	Kurdish	?	?
4	Bllêse (blaze)	1951	Sulaymaniyah	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	5
5	Dengî Das (news)	1951-1954	Derbendîxan	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	?

6	Afretî Azad (free woman)	1952	Sulaymaniyah	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	?
7	Kanêskan (a place)	1952	Sulaymaniyah	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	?
8	Goêje (a mountain)	1952	Sulaymaniyah	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	?
9	Rizgarî El-Cedîde (new deliverance)	1952	Baghdad	Magazine	Arabic	?	?
10	Nirkey Cutyar (1953-1958	Şarezûr	Newspaper	Kurdish	Clandestine	8
11	Rêga (road)	1953	Iraqi kurdistan	Pamphlet	Kurdish	?	?
12	Peyam (message)	15 Jun. 1953-1955	Baghdad	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	200
13	Yekêtî Felañ (farmers union)	1954	Sulaymaniyah	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	2
14	Dengî Feqê (the voice of Feqê)	1954	Sulaymaniyah	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	5
15	Hetaw (sun)	15 May1954-Nov. 1960	Erbil	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	188
16	Yekêtî lawan (youths union)	1954	Kirkuk	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	?
17	Rêgay nwê (new road)	1954	Iraqi kurdistan	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	?
18	Rûnakî (light)	1954	Sulaymaniyah	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	?
19	Gencan (youths)	Mar. 1954	Sulaymaniyah	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	Few
20	Nîda Kurdistan (the call of Kurdistan)	1956	?	Pamphlet	Arabic& Kurdish	Clandestine	Few
21	El-Emel (the hope)	1956	Erbil	Magazine	Arabic	Public	2
22	El-Sîrxê (yelp)	1956	Iraqi kurdistan	Pamphlet	Arabic	Clandestine	1
23	Azadî Kurdistan (freedom for Kurdistan)	1956-1957	Kirkuk	Newspaper	Kurdish	Clandestine & public	?
24	Kurdistan	1956	Bedre	Magazine	?	?	?
25	Xebatî Kurdistan (Kurdistan struggle)	Mar. 1957	Kirkuk	Newspaper	Kurdish& Arabic	Clandestine	?
26	El-Seqafe (culture)	1957-1958	Erbil	Magazine	Arabic	Public	Few
27	Hîwa (hope)	Jul. 1957- Feb. 1963	Baghdad	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	38
28	Pêşkewtin (progress)	Feb. 1958-Feb. 1963	Baghdad	Magazine & newspaper	Kurdish& Arabic	Public	513-?
29	Xebat (struggle)	4 Apr. 1959-28 Mar. 1961	Baghdad	Newspaper	Kurdish & Arabic	Public & Clandestine	462
30	Rastî (El-Heqîqe) (truth)	7 May 1959- 3 Apr. 1960	Mosul	Newspaper	Kurdish& Arabic	Public	24
31	Azadî (freedom)	1 May 1959 - 1960	Kirkuk & Baghdad	Newspaper	Kurdish	Public	156
32	Ray gel (people's view)	6 Sep. 1959-15 Sep. 1962	Kirkuk	Newspaper	Kurdish& Arabic	Public	71
33	Şefeq (Beyan)	15 Jan. 1958-1963	Kirkuk& Sulaymaniyah	Magazine	Arabic& Kurdish	Public	?
34	Nîştman (homeland)	21 Mar. 1959	Sulaymaniyah	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	Public	1

35	Rizgarî (deliverance)	Feb. 1959	Baghdad	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	Public	2
36	Newroz (Kurdish first day of year)	1959	Sulaymaniyah	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	3
37	Afret (woman)	May 1959- Aug. 1963	Baghdad	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	Public	15
38	Blêse (blaze)	Aug. 1959- Jun. 1960	Sulaymaniyah	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	11
39	Hîway Kurdistan (Kurdistan hope)	Nov. 1959- 19 Oct. 1960	Sulaymaniyah	Magazine & Newspaper	Kurdish	Public	13
40	Dengî Qutabyan (the voice of the students)	May 1959- Mar. 1960	Baghdad	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	4
41	Dengî Qutabyan (the voice of the students)	13 Aug. 1959	Kirkuk	Magazine	Kurdish, Arabic & Turkish	Clandestine	3
42	Huner (art)	1959	Sulaymaniyah	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	1
43	El-Cimhurye (the republic)	1958	Sulaymaniyah	Pamphlet	Arabic	Public	?
44	El-Xed (tomorrow)	1958	Dhok	Pamphlet	Arabic	Public	2
45	Seywan (a place)	1958	Sulaymaniyah	Pamphlet	Kurdish, English & Arabic	Public	?
46	Çareserkirdnî kiştukall (processing agriculture)	1959- Nov. 1962	Baghdad	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	Public	21
47	Meşxellî Newroz (Newroz troch)	25 Jun. 1959- May 1960	Sulaymaniyah	Newspaper	Kurdish	Public	19
48	Gawirbaxî (a place)	1959	Kirkuk	Newspaper	?	Public	35
49	Serçnar (a place)	1959	Sulaymaniyah	Pamphlet	Arabic	Public	Few
50	Aştî (peace)	Jul. 1959	Sulaymaniyah	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Public	?
51	Jyan (life)	Nov. 1959	Erbil	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	2
52	Gzing (morning)	1959	Sulaymaniyah	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	1
53	Goêje (a mountain)	1959	Sulaymaniyah	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	1
54	Xebat (struggle)	1955	Kirkuk	Newspaper	Arabic	Clandestine	?

Iraqi Kurdish periodicals issued from 1960-1969:

	Title	Dates	Place of Issue	Type	Language (s)	Status	Total
1	Birrwa (principle)	2 Jul. 1960- 25 Jan. 1963	Sulaymaniyah	Newspaper	Kurdish	Public	95
2	Namîlkey slêmanî (Sulaimanyah booklet)	Feb. 1960	Sulaymaniyah	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	1
3	Sewt El-Ekrad- Dengî Kurd (the voice of the Kurd)	Aug. 1960- 14 May 1961	Baghdad	Newspaper	Kurdish & Arabic	Public	75
4	Pêşrew (a name)	1960	Kirkuk	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic & Turkish	Public	3

5	Rojî Nwê (new day)	Apr. 1960- 30 Sep. 1961	Sulaymaniyah	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	18
6	Rûnahî (light)	Oct. 1960- Sep. 1961	Baghdad	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	10
7	Îraqî Nwê (new Iraq)	Oct. 1960- Mar. 1962	Baghdad	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	24
8	Kurdistan	Jun. 1960	Sulaymaniyah	Newspaper	Kurdish	Public	?
9	Kurdistan	4 Mar. 1961- 1 Apr. 1961	Baghdad	Newspaper	Kurdish	Public	5
10	El- Îxlas (fidelity)	1961-1962	Erbil	Newspaper	Arabic	Public	?
11	El-Edîb El- 'Îraqî (the Iraqi writer)	1961	Baghdad	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	1
12	Erbil- Hewlêr (a city)	10 Feb. 1962- 1964	Erbil	Newspaper	Kurdish & Arabic	Public	76
13	Dîsan Barzanî (again Barzani)	1962	Sulaymaniyah	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	9
14	Sewt Kurdistan (the voice of Kurdistan)	Nov. 1962- May 1968	Baghdad	Pamphlet	Arabic	Clandestine	?
15	Rêgay Kurdistan (the road of Kurdistan (goal))	1962-1973	Erbil	Newspaper	Kurdish	Clandestine	Few
16	Amanc	1962_?	Sulaymaniyah	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	Public	?
17	Dengî Kurdistan	1963	LMA	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	Few
18	El-Seqafe	1962	Akrê	Pamphlet	Arabic	Public	?
19	Rizgarî Kurdistan	1 May 1963- 1970	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	?
20	Dengî Pêşmerge	1963-1974	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	28
21	Hewraman	1963	Sulaymaniyah- Tewêlle	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	2
22	El-Tebux (Tutin)	Nov. 1963- 1972	Baghdad	Magazine	Arabic & Kurdish	Public	24
23	Îraq	1963	Baghdad	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	?
24	Dengubasî Kurdistan	1963	LMA	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	?
25	Asoy Kurd	1964	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	Few
26	Prişnig	1964	Sulaymaniyah	Magazine	Kurdish	?	Few
27	Wêje	1964	Sulaymaniyah	Pamphlet	Kurdish	?	5
28	Raperrîn- El-Nehze	Mar. 1964- Jan. 1968	Sulaymaniyah	Newspaper	Arabic & Kurdish	Public	208
29	Berew Pêşewe	Oct. 1964-	LMA	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	3
30	Hewlî Kurdistan-Exbar kurdistan	1965	LMA	Pamphlet	Kurdish & Arabic	Clandestine	12
31	Bahoz	1965	Baghdad	Pamphlet	Arabic	Clandestine	?
32	Hewallî lîwa	1965-1967	Sulaymaniyah	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	?
33	Jyanî hîzb	1965	Iraqi Kurdistan	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	?

34	Dengî Qutabyanî (Sewt Telebe Kurdistan)	1965	LMA	Pamphlet	Kurdish & Arabic	Clandestine	?
35	Dengubas- El-Exbar	Jan. 1966- 27 Oct. 1967	Baghdad	Newspaper	Arabic & Kurdish	Public	409-?
36	Agir	Feb. 1966	Iraqi Kurdistan	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	Few
37	Lawan	1966	Iraqi Kurdistan	Pamphlet	Kurdish	?	?
38	Pêşrew	1966	Iraqi Kurdistan	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	3
39	Xebatî Kurdistan	Mar. 1966- Feb. 1968	Iraqi Kurdistan	Newspaper	Kurdish	Clandestine	7
40	Hewallname	1966	Sulaymaniyah	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	?
41	Raber	1966-1968	Sulaymaniyah	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	3
42	Sewt Kurdistan-Dengî Kurdistan	1967-1969	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	Clandestine	14
43	Pişko	1967-1969?	Kirkuk	Magazine	Kurdish	?	7-?
44	Elteaxî	29 Apr. 1967- 11 Nov. 1968	Baghdad	Newspaper	Arabic	Public	429
45	Brayî	6 May 1967- 9 Nov. 1968	Baghdad	Newspaper	Kurdish	Public	72
46	Gzing- Çya (Emerge)	May 1967- 1968	Sulaymaniyah	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	Public	2
47	Allay Kargeran	1967-1970	Sulaymaniyah	Newspaper	Kurdish	Clandestine	?
48	Xebatî Qutabyan-Nîzall El-Telebe	Nov. 1967- 1973	Erbil, Baghdad & LMA	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	Public & Clandestine	13
49	Rizgarî (Deliverance)	1967	Sulaymaniyah	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	?
50	Neşret El-Exbar	1967	Baghdad	Pamphlet	Arabic	Clandestine	?
51	Sefîn (a mountain)	1967-Oct. 1989	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	Clandestine	37
52	Kadir (cadre)	Jul. 1968- 1991	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	Clandestine	25
53	Slêmanî	Jul. 1968- 1970	Sulaymaniyah	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	Public	17
54	Karî Mîllî (Teamwork)	11 Nov. 1968- Jul. 1969	Baghdad	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	Public	16
55	Meşxell- Elşu'le (Troch)	1968	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish, Arabic & Turkish	Clandestine	Few
56	Helmet	1968	Erbil	Magazine	Kurdish	?	?
57	Çekî Xebat	1968	Sulaymaniyah	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	?
58	Gullzar	1968	Erbil	Pamphlet	Kurdish	?	?
59	Raber	Feb. 1968- Dec. 1969?	Sulaymaniyah	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	13
60	El-Nûr	12 Oct. 1968- 29 Mar. 1970	Baghdad	Newspaper	Arabic	Public	432
61	Rûnakî	23 May 1969- 3 Oct. 1969	Baghdad	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	2
62	Tîşk	1969-1970	Erbil	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	2

63	Rizgarî (Deliverance)	20 Apr. 1969-Mar. 1970	Sulaymaniyah	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	15
64	Brûske- Dengubas	15 Aug. 1969-Feb. 1970	Sulaymaniyah	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	11
65	Renc	Aug. 1969	Sulaymaniyah	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	3
66	Beyan	Nov. 1969-2002	Baghdad	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	196
67	Exbar Wezaret Şun El-Şîmal	1969-1972?	Baghdad	Pamphlet	Arabic & Kurdish	Public	Few
68	Jyan	1960	Erbil	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	2

Iraqi Kurdish periodicals issued from 1970-1979:

	Title	Dates	Place of Issue	Type	Language (s)	Status	Total
1	Hawkarî	9 Jan. 1970-10 Feb. 1998	Baghdad	Newspaper	Kurdish	Public	2847-?
2	Defterî Kurdewarî	Jan. 1970-Aug. 1970	Baghdad	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	3
3	Nobere	1970	Baghdad	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	3
4	Mujde	1970	Erbil	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	?
5	Rêjne	1970-1971?	Erbil	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	Few
6	Bllêse	1970	Iraqi Kurdistan	Pamphlet	Arabic	Clandestine	Few
7	Allay Sûrî Kurdayetî	1970-1980s	Iraqi Kurdistan	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	?
8	Tîşkî Huner	Mar. 1970	Sulaymaniyah	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	1
9	Hewlêr	1970-1972	Erbil	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	Public	12-?
10	Brayetî	1 Jun. 1970-Apr. 1971	Baghdad & Sulaymaniyah	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	14
11	Brayetî	11 Sep. 1971-18 Mar. 1972	Sulaymaniyah	Newspaper	Kurdish	Public	17
12	Brayetî	26 May 1972-2 Mar. 1974	Baghdad	Newspaper	Kurdish	Public	86
13	Mcelet Kulyet El'lûm	1970	Sulaymaniyah	Magazine	Arabic	Public	?
14	Şorrşî Kiştukall	1970	Baghdad	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	Public	5
15	Çya	Feb. 1970-Feb. 1971	Dhok & Erbil	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	2
16	Zanyarî	Oct. 1970-	Baghdad	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	Few
17	Jîn	10 Nov. 1970-Mar. 1974	Sulaymaniyah	Newspaper	Kurdish	Public	153-?
18	Gêtî Pûl	1970-?	Baghdad	Magazine	Arabic, Kurdish & English	Public	?
19	Xebatî Qutabyan	1970	Baghdad	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	?	8
20	Pêşkevtin-El-Teqedum	1971	Dhok	Pamphlet	Arabic	Clandestine	17

21	Govarî Kolêcî Edebyat	1974-1979	Baghdad	Magazine	Kurdish, Arabic & English	Public	?
22	Perwerdew Zansit	1971-1981	Baghdad	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	18
23	Rhêlle	1971	Erbil	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	1
24	Dengî Mamosta	Feb. 1971-1973	Sulaymaniyah	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	10
25	Nûserî Kurd	Mar. 1971-Jan. 1975	Baghdad & Sulaymaniyah	Magazine	Kurdish	Public & Clandestine	12
26	Roşnibîrî	1971	Erbil	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Public	31- ?
27	Rêgay Yekêtî	Apr. 1971-1973	Baghdad	Newspaper	Kurdish, Persian, Turkish & Azeri	Public	?
28	Neşret El-Exbar	1960s-1974	LMA	Pamphlet	Arabic	Clandestine	?
29	Rojî Kurdistan	Jun. 1971-1993	Baghdad	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	Public	82
30	Dengî Felah	May 1971	Baghdad	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	Public	?
31	Rwange	25 Apr. 1970-1972	Baghdad	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	3
32	Sewt Kurdistan	1972	Iraqi Kurdistan	Pamphlet	Arabic	Clandestine	?
33	Bîrî Nwê	17 Jun. 1972-Dec. 1978?	Baghdad	Newspaper	Kurdish & Arabic	Public & Clandestine	319- ?
34	Brayetî	1 Jan 1974- 7 Feb. 1974	Baghdad	Newspaper	Kurdish	Public	26
35	Rêgay Kurdistan	27 Jul. 1972-?	LMA	Newspaper	Kurdish	Clandestine	?
36	Çya	1971	Sulaymaniyah	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	1
37	Peyamî Krêkar	1972	Sulaymaniyah	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	Few
38	Bîrî Nwê	1972	Erbil	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	1
39	El-Bîdaye	Mar. 1972	Erbil	Magazine	Arabic	Public	1
40	Têkoşer	1972-	Baghdad	Pamphlet & Magazine	Kurdish	Public	?
41	Gzing	1972-1991	Kirkuk, Erbil & LMA	Magazine	Kurdish	Public & Clandestine	17
42	Pêşrew	1972	?	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	?	1
43	Estêre	1972- Feb. 1974	Sulaymaniyah	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	3
44	Nûserî Nwê	Jun. 1972-Sep. 1980	Erbil	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	5
45	Berew Rûnakî	1 Jul. 1972-1973	Erbil- Gellalle	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	3
46	Xebatî lawan- Nîzall El-Şebîbe	1972	Baghdad	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	Public	1
47	Allay Sûr	1972- 1973	Kirkuk	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	3
48	Rêbazî Qutabyan	1972-1973	Sulaymaniyah	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	4

49	Huşyarî Krêkaran-Weî El-'umal	7 Nov. 1972-1976	Baghdad	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	Public	189
50	Rewşen	1 mar. 1972	Dhok	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	Public	1
51	Xermanî wşe	1973	Erbil	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	1
52	Çray geş	1973	Dhok	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	Few
53	Korî Zanyarîy Kurd	1973-2006	Baghdad	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	Public	?
54	Bawe Gûrgûr	Jan. 1973-Nov. 1973	Kirkuk	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	Clandestine	3
55	Dengî Qutabyan	1973	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	3
56	Roşnibîr	1973	Erbil	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	1
57	Bo pêşewe	Feb. 1973-Mar. 1974	Erbil	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	3
58	Çwarçra	1973	Erbil	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	1
59	Çraya Geş-El-Meş'el El-Weza	1973-1974	Dhok- Serseng	Pamphlet	Kurdish & Arabic	Public	2
60	Roşnibîrî Nwê	11 Nov. 1973-2003	Baghdad	Newspaper & Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	Public	154
61	Hêvî	Sep. 1973-Dec. 1973	Dhok	Pamphlet	Kurdish & Arabic	Public	7
62	Amanc	Jan. 1974	Baghdad	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	Public	1
63	Karwanî Qutabyan	1974	Mosul	Magazine	Kurdish	?	?
64	Rêbazî Krêkaran	1974	Erbil	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	1
65	Dengî kurd	1974	?	Magazine	Kurdish	?	1
66	Dyarî Lawan	Oct. 1974-Jan. 1975	Erbil- Çoman (LMA)	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	2
67	Dengî Mamosta	1974	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	Clandestine	2
68	Qelladze	Jun. 1974	LMA	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	Few
69	Rizgarî	1974	Dyala	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	Clandestine	Few
70	Dengî kurdistan	Jan. 1975	Erbil- Çoman (LMA)	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	1
71	Xebatî Lawan	1974-1975	Erbil- Çoman (LMA)	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	?
72	Huna Sewt Kurdistan El-'îraq	1974-1975	Erbil- Çoman (LMA)	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	Clandestine	4
73	Rencder	1975- Nov. 1976	Sulaymaniyah	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	4
74	Karwan	29 Apr. 1975	Erbil	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Public	1
75	Lawan- Elşebab	Apr. 1975-1977	Dhok	Pamphlet	Kurdish & Arabic	Public	12
76	Estêre	May 1975-	Baghdad	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	3
77	Zanko	1975-	Sulaymaniyah & Erbil	Magazine	Kurdish, Arabic & English	Public	?

78	El-Şerare	Nov. 1975-1991	Damascus, LMA & Erbil	Pamphlet & newspaper	Arabic	Clandestine	85
79	Blawkrawey Dengubasî Zankoy Slêmanî	1975	Sulaymaniyah	Pamphlet	English	Public	Few
80	Otonomî- El-Hukim El-Zatî	Jan. 1976-1990	Erbil	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	Public	63
81	El-Şimû'	1976	Dhok	Magazine	Arabic	Public	1
82	Trîfe	1976-1982 Aug.	Sulaymaniyah	Pamphlet	Kurdish & Arabic	Public	9-?
83	Rêbazî Nwê	Jan. 1976-1992	Lebanon, Damascus & LMA	Pamphlet & newspaper	Kurdish	Clandestine	86
84	Gullalle	1976-1977	Sulaymaniyah	Pamphlet	Kurdish & Arabic	Public	Few
85	Rêrew	1976	Sulaymaniyah	Pamphlet	Kurdish & Arabic	Public	Few
86	Mhîrecanî Zanko	1976- 1977	Sulaymaniyah	Pamphlet	Kurdish& Arabic	Public	?
87	Şorrşigêr- El-Sewre	Mar. 1977-1980	Baghdad	Magazine	Kurdish& Arabic	Clandestine	41
88	Allay Şorrş	Sep. 1977	LMA	Newspaper	Kurdish	Clandestine	1
89	'Îraq	21 Mar. 1977-22 Aug. 1990	Baghdad	Newspaper	Kurdish& Arabic	Public	204
90	Belaxî 'eskerî	1977	LMA- Newzeng	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	Few
91	Mektebet Zanko	1977	Sulaymaniyah	Magazine	Kurdish, Arabic & English	Public	3
92	Xebatî kurdistan	Jul. 1977-	LMA	Newspaper	Kurdish	Clandestine	Few
93	Rencî Krêkar	May 1977-1986	Sulaymaniyah	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	?
94	Qutabyan	1977	Erbil	Magazine	Kurdish& Arabic	Public	3
95	Asoy zankoyî	May 1977-	Sulaymaniyah & Erbil	Magazine	Kurdish& Arabic	Public	?
96	El-Şu'le	Mar. 1978- 29 Jul. 1993	Damascus, LMA & Dhok	Newspaper	Arabic	Clandestine	?
97	Hewallnamey Şorrş- Hewallnamey Kurdistanî 'Îraq	May 1978- Jun. 1981	LMA	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	15
98	Şorrşî Kîştukallî	Jan. 1978-1981	Baghdad	Magazine	Kurdish& Arabic	Public	13- ?
99	Komelle	1978-1987 Apr.	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	31
100	Komelle	1978-1986 Mar.	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	13
101	Azadî	1979	LMA	Newspaper	Kurdish	Clandestine	Few
102	Nûserî Kurd	May 1979- Aug. 1983	Sulaymaniyah & Baghdad	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	13
103	El-Xed El-Muşrîq	1978-1979	Dhok	Pamphlet	Arabic	Public	9
104	Dengî Pêşmerge	1979-1983 Feb.	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	28

105	Ayinde- Dwarroj	1979	Baghdad	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	3
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Iraqi Kurdish periodicals issued from 1980-1989:

	Title	Dates	Place of Issue	Type	Language (s)	Status	Total
1	Peyv	Mar. 1980-	Dhok	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	1
2	Bzûtnewe	Jan. 1980-1982	LMA	Pamphlet	Kurdish & Arabic	Clandestine	7
3	El-Xelîc	1980-1983	LMA	Pamphlet	Arabic	Clandestine	6
4	Zanko	1980	Sulaymaniyah	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	Public	Few
5	Têkoşanî Xebatî Qutabyan	1980-1988	LMA	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	11
6	Karwanî Afret	18 Aug. 1980-15 Oct. 1980	Sulaymaniyah	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	5
7	Şnirwê- Asoge	1980	Sulaymaniyah	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	6
8	Qutabyanî Îraq	1980	Iraqi Kurdistan	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Public	?
9	Newroz	1980	Sulaymaniyah	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	Few
10	Exbar Kurdistan-Dengubasî kurdistan	Mar. 1980-May 1990	LMA	Pamphlet	Kurdish & Arabic	Clandestine	193
11	Rêbazî Pêşmerge	8 Feb. 1980-1988	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	?
12	Abûrî Zan	Jul. 1980-1982	Erbil	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	3
13	El-Xenadq	1980-1981	LMA	Magazine	Arabic	Clandestine	?
14	Têkoşanî Qutabyanî Kurdistan	1981- 1984	LMA	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	7
15	El-Nesîr El-Seqafî	4 Oct. 1980-	LMA	Pamphlet	Arabic	Clandestine	5
16	Dengî Brusk Kurd	1981	LMA	Pamphlet	Arabic	Clandestine	Few
17	Fecir El-Nesîr	Jan. 1981-1986	LMA	Pamphlet	Arabic	Clandestine	31
18	Elendê Pêşmerge	Mar. 1981-1984	LMA	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	?
19	Allay Sûrî Kurdayetî	1981-1985	LMA	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	29
20	Pêrû	Mar. 1981	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	1
21	Metîn	Apr. 1981-Apr.1988-cont.	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	Clandestine	72
22	Nûserî Kurdistan	Aug. 1981-1991	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	18
23	Gel- El- Şe'b	1981-1992	Damascus & LMA	Newspaper	Kurdish & Arabic	Clandestine	51
24	Rêgay Azadî	1981- 1994	LMA & Erbil	Newspaper	Kurdish	Clandestine & Public	86
25	Rêbazî Xwêndkaran	1981-1982	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	8
26	Sosyalîst	1981- Oct. 1990	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	17

27	Sûf Erbil	1981	Erbil	Magazine	Arabic	Public	?
28	Xanzad	1982	Erbil	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Public	?
29	Hrûr	Dec. 1981-1983	LMA	Pamphlet	Kurdish & Arabic	Clandestine	17
30	Pêşeng	Sep. 1982-1991	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine (then Public)	21
31	Jyanî Rêkixraweyîman	Dec. 1982-1983	LMA	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	15
32	Bllawkrawey Nawxo	1982	LMA	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	?
33	Raperrîn	Jul. 1982-1983	LMA	Magazine & newspaper	Kurdish	Clandestine	8
34	Pêşmerge	Jan. 1983-Nov. 1991	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	9
35	Xebatî Mamosta	Oct. 1982-Jan. 1987	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	10
36	Karwan	Oct. 1982-Cont.	Erbil	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	Public	?
37	Şehîdanî Kurdistan	1982	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	Few
38	Sewt El-Îsbu'	Jan. 1982	LMA	Pamphlet	Arabic	Clandestine	1
39	Edebî bêganan	1982- 1985	?	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	5
40	Kiştukall	1982	Erbil	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	1
41	Rêya Serkeftinê- Terîq El-Nesr	1983	LMA	Newspaper	Kurdish & Arabic	Clandestine	8
42	Xebatî qutabyan	1983	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	3
43	Gazya Xwêndkar u Lawan- Roja Lawan	Mar. 1983-JAN. 1992	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	Clandestine	46
44	Hellwêst	Jul. 1983	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	1
45	Rêbazî Lawan	Aug. 1983-1989	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	16
46	Kîfah El-Ensar	1983	LMA	Pamphlet	Arabic	Clandestine	Few
47	Têkoşan	Mar. 1983-Dec. 1994	LMA & Erbil	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine (then public)	19
48	Behdînan	1983- 1985	LMA	Pamphlet	Kurdish & Arabic	Clandestine	10
49	Jîlwan	1985	LMA	Newspaper	Kurdish	Clandestine	8
50	Hawdeng	Nov. 1983-Nov. 1984	Erbil	Magazine	Kurdish	public	2
51	Bawegurrurr	1983	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	1
52	Senger	1983	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	1
53	Dengî Şorrîî 'îraq	Sep. 1983-1987	LMA	Pamphlet	Kurdish & Arabic	Clandestine	7
54	Estêre	Feb. 1983	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	1

55	Srûşt	1983	LMA	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	3
56	Nûserî Nwê	1983	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	1
57	Kurdayetî	Jan. 1983- Jul. 1984	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	Clandestine	4
58	Doza gel	Feb. 1983- Mar. 1983	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	2
59	Kosar	1983	LMA	Newspaper	Kurdish	Clandestine	4
60	Rafd zîwe	Jan. 1984- 1986	LMA	Magazine	Arabic	Clandestine	?
61	Sûrên	Aug. 1983- Dec. 1991	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	66
62	Rsale Sewret Kurdistan El-Îraq	Jun. 1984- Jul. 1985	LMA	Pamphlet	Kurdish & Arabic	Clandestine	8
63	Bawegurrurr	Aug. 1984- Jul. 1987	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	15
64	Rizgarî	Aug. 1984- Jul. 1989	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	22
65	Nêrgiz	Dec. 1984- May 1985	Kirkuk	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	Few
66	Asos	1984	Erbil	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	Few
67	Folklor	1984- 1991	Erbil	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	3
68	Kajaw	1984	Sulaymayyah	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	1
69	Allay Pêşmerge	1984	LMA	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	Few
70	Asoy îslam	1984- 1986	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	Clandestine	5
71	Peyamî Şorrî Kurdistanî Îraq	1984	LMA	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	?
72	Roşnibîrî	1984- 1985	LMA	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	12
73	El-întîfaze	Jul. 1984- 1986	LMA	Pamphlet	Arabic	Clandestine	7
74	Bang	1989- Oct. 1990	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	Clandestine	5
75	Roşnibîrî Pêşmerge	1984	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	Clandestine	?
76	Gzingî Bçûkan	Mar. 1985- Sep. 1985	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	3
77	Nûserî Kurd	Mar. 1985- 1999	Baghdad & Erbil	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	20-?
78	Xabûr	Jan. 1985- 1986	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	Clandestine	?
79	Horre	Jan. 1985- 1990	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	4
80	Rizgarî	Aug. 1985- Nov. 1987	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	24
81	Karwanî Werizş	Jul. 1985- 1986	Erbil	Newspaper	Kurdish & Arabic	Public	11
82	Edebî Mindallan	Jan. 1985- 1991	Erbil	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	2
83	Bîrî nwê	Jan. 1985- Cont.	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	?
84	Mamostay kurd	Feb. 1985- 1995	?	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	25

85	Dengê me	1985- 1989	Dhok	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	4
86	Hellmet	1985	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	Clandestine	1
87	Newroz El-îraq	May. 1986- Mar. 1990	Baghdad	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	Public	12
88	Peyamî Brayetî	Jan,1986- 1988	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	Clandestine	?
89	Allay azadî	1986_	LMA, Erbil & Sulaymaniyah	Newspaper	Kurdish	Clandestine (then public)	?
90	Hellwêst	1986	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	3
91	Rêgay Aştî û Sosyalîzm	1986-1992	?	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	28
92	El-Rafîd	1986- 1988	LMA	Pamphlet	Arabic	Clandestine	12
93	Pênciwên	1986	Sulaymaniyah	Pamphlet	Kurdish & Arabic	Public	1-?
94	Girdemend	1986	Erbil	Pamphlet	Kurdish & Arabic	Public	15
95	El-Raqîd	1986	LMA	Pamphlet	Arabic	Clandestine	?
96	Şu'a'	1983-1985	LMA	Pamphlet	Arabic	Clandestine	Few
97	Gafk	1984-1986	LMA	Pamphlet	Kurdish & Arabic	Clandestine	?
98	14 Ektober	1983-1985	LMA	Pamphlet	?	Clandestine	?
99	Stêra sûr	1984-1986	LMA	Pamphlet	Kurdish & Arabic	Clandestine	?
100	Munazîl El-Hîzb	1985-1986	LMA	Pamphlet	?	Clandestine	?
101	Ezmir	Dec. 1985- Oct. 1986	LMA	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	11
102	Elmefreze 47	1982-1983	LMA	Pamphlet	?	Clandestine	?
103	Pîrmûs	Mar. 1982- Mar. 1984	LMA	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	?
104	Rengîn	1987- Jan. 2003	Baghdad	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	168
105	Dengî krêkar	21 Mar. 1986- 11 Mar. 1988	Sulaymaniyah	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	5
106	Têkoşerî hîzb	1986	LMA	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	1
107	Xebatî afretan	1986	LMA	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	2
108	Tendrustî û Komell	Sep. 1987- 1991	Erbil	Magazine	Kurdish	Public	35
109	Hewlêr- Erbil	14 Aug. 1987- 15 Aug. 1987	Erbil	Pamphlet	Kurdish & Arabic	Public	2
110	Qendîl	Feb. 1987- Jul. 1988	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	4
111	Dhok	1987-1990	Dhok	Pamphlet	Arabic	Public	4
112	Dengî bawerr	8 Sep. 1987- 1993	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	30
113	Beyan	1987	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	1

114	Pêşkewtin- Teqedûm	El-	Jan. 1987- 2000	LMA (then Erbil)	Newspaper	Kurdish & Arabic	Clandestine (Then public)	85
115	Pêşkewtin- Roşnîbîrî		1 Jan. 1988- Apr. 1990	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine (Then public)	4
116	Dengî Afret		1988- 1997	LMA (then Dhok & Erbil)	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine (Then public)	13
117	Dengî lawan û qutabyan		Jun. 1984- Nov. 1990	LMA	Newspaper	Kurdish & Arabic	Clandestine	9
118	Raperrîni Xwendkaran		1987- Jun.1990	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	6
119	Pêşkewtin		Mar. 1986- Apr. 1988	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	5
120	Keltûr		Jun. 1987- Nov. 1990	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	Clandestine	5
121	Berey Kurdistanî		Sep. 1988- Mar. 1992	Wirmê , Şno , Rajan & Erbil	Newspaper	Kurdish	Clandestine	32
122	El-Cebhe Kurdistanyê	El-	May 1989	?	Newspaper	Arabic	Clandestine	Few
123	Dengî qutabyan û lawan		Jan. 1988- Mar. 1988	LMA	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	2
124	Hellwêstî Edebî		Nov. 1988- Aug. 1989	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	4
125	Peyamî Krêkaran		Oct. 1988- Aug. 1989	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	4
126	Neşre Exbarye		1988- Apr. 1989	LMA	Pamphlet	Arabic	Clandestine	8
127	Alla		Sep. 1988- Aug. 1990	LMA	Newspaper	Kurdish	Clandestine	17
128	Jyanî Nwê		Feb. 1989- 1994- Cont.	LMA	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	16
129	14î ab		Jul. & Aug. 1989	Erbil	Pamphlet	Arabic	Public	?
130	Wesanan		Jan. 1989- Dec. 1989	LMA	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	2
131	Aso		22 Jul. 1989- 18 Aug. 1990	Baghdad	Newspaper	Kurdish	Public	55
132	Bzav		1 Aug. 1989- 28 Aug. 1990	Baghdad	Newspaper	Kurdish	Public	56
133	Jîlemo		Aug.1989- Nov. 1990	Erbil	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	7
134	Serbexoyî		Dec. 1989- 1992	LMA	Newspaper	Kurdish	Clandestine	25- ?
135	Rebî El-întîsar		Apr. 1989	Erbil	Newspaper	Arabic	public	3

Iraqi Kurdish periodicals issued from 1990- March1991

	Title	Dates	Place of Issue	Type	Language (s)	Status	Total
1	Karwanî Mindallan	28 Apr. 1990- Jun. 1990	Erbil	Magazine	Kurdish	public	2
2	Karwanî folklor	1990	Erbil	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	public	1
3	Karwan bo Zansitî Mrovayetî	1990	Erbil	Magazine	Kurdish & Arabic	public	1

4	Tewar	Mar. 1990-	Seqiz & Sulaymaniyah	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	?
5	Terazû	1990-	Seqiz & Erbil	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	?
6	Allay şorrş	May 1990-1992	LMA & Erbil	Newspaper	Kurdish	Clandestine	12
7	Çray azadî	30 Jan. 1991-Mar. 1991	Erbil	Pamphlet	Kurdish	Clandestine	7
8	Mem	Jan. 1991	Erbil- Şeqllawe	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	Few
9	Qella	11 Feb. 1991-Aug. 1992	Erbil- Rwaniz	Magazine	Kurdish	Clandestine	10

Abbreviations and symbols: LMA: Liberated Mountainous Area; Few: 5 or less; ?: Unknown);
-?: more than.

Source: El-Bettî (2011); Hatem (2005); Tenya (2004); Eħmed (2004b); Eħmed (2002); 'Umer (2002); Eħmed (2001a); Eħmed (2001b); Emîn (2001); 'Umer (2001); Hesên (2000); Mehdi (2000); Eħmed (1998); Surmê (1997); Hassanpour (1992); Eħmed (1978); Eħmed & Zengene (unpublished work).

Appendix 2: Kurdish radio stations in the Kurdistan region (2015)

Erbil province:

	Name	Place
1	Aştî (peace)- Bzûtnewey Dîmukraî (peace-democracy movement)	Erbil
2	Azadî û yeksanî	Erbil
3	Babylon	Erbil
4	Bii	Erbil
5	Biyaban (desert)	Erbil
6	Bzûtnewey îslamî (IMK)	Erbil
7	Çaksazî (reform)	Erbil
8	Cîhan (the world)	Erbil
9	Çray rûnakî (lamp of)	Erbil
10	Dadperwerî (justice)	Erbil
11	Dahatû	Erbil
12	Dengî Aştî (the voice of peace)	Erbil
13	Dengî komell (the voice of KIG- Kurdistan Islamic Group)	Erbil
14	Dengî Kurdistan (the voice of Kurdistan)	Erbil- Pîrmam
15	Dengî Qereçûx (a mountain)	Erbil- Mexmûr
16	Dengî Quranî pîroz (the voice of holy Quran)	Erbil
17	Dengî Serbexoyî	Erbil
18	Dewran (turning)	Erbil
19	Dîmukrasî (democracy)	Erbil
20	Effect	Erbil
21	Erbil Traffic	Erbil
22	Êsta (now)	Erbil
23	Fax	Erbil
24	FM	Erbil
25	Hêlîn (a name)	Erbil
26	Herman (Kurdish name)	Erbil- Mêrgesûr
27	Hest (feeling)	Erbil
28	Hetaw (sun)	Erbil
29	Hewlêr (Erbil)	Erbil
30	Îşq (a college)	Erbil
31	Jîn (life)	Erbil
32	M Studio	Erbil
33	Mellbendî 3 (PUK) (a partisan organization)	Erbil
34	Meşxellan (torches)	Erbil- Koye
35	Mexmûr (Kurdish city)	Erbil- Mexmûr
36	Mnare (beacon)	Erbil
37	Name	Place
38	Newjînî tendrustî (health)	Erbil
39	Nwê (new)	Erbil
40	Paytext (the capital)	Erbil
41	Peyamî Quran (the meassge of Quran)	Erbil
42	Peyamnêr (reporter)	Erbil
43	Radyoy zanayan (clerics radio)	Erbil
44	Royal FM	Erbil
45	Rudaw (event)	Erbil
46	Rûdaw miyuzîk (event-music)	Erbil
47	Senterî Teq Teq (a town)	Erbil- Teq Teq
48	Sîma (countenance)	Erbil
49	Twanasazî afretan (women capacity)	Erbil

50	Xebat (struggle)	Erbil
51	Yekgirtû (united)	Erbil- Koye
52	Yekgirtû (united)	Erbil
53	Z 'Zagros' (a mountain)	Erbil
54	Zanko (university)	Erbil
55	Zankoy Cîhan (Cîhan University)	Erbil
56	Zarî kirmancî (kirmancî accent)	Erbil

Sulaymaniyah province:

	Name	Place
1	Cemawer (people)	Sulaymaniyah
2	Deng (voice)	Sulaymaniyah-Kelar
3	Dengî aşitî (the voice of peace)	Sulaymaniyah
4	Dengî Gelî Kurdistan (the voice of Kurdistan people)	Sulaymaniyah
5	Dengî Gorran (the voice of change)	Sulaymaniyah
6	Dengî îslam (the voice of Islam)	Sulaymaniyah-Kelar
7	Dengî komell (the voice of KIG- Kurdistan Islamic Group)	Sulaymaniyah- Ranye
8	Dengî komell (the voice of KIG- Kurdistan Islamic Group)	Sulaymaniyah
9	Dengî komell (the voice of KIG- Kurdistan Islamic Group)	Sulaymaniyah- Kelar
10	Dengî Ktêb (the voice of book)	Sulaymaniyah
11	Dengî Kurdsat (the voice of Kurdsat)	Sulaymaniyah
12	Dengî nwê (New voice)	Sulaymaniyah- Halabja
13	Dengî serbexo (independent voice)	Sulaymaniyah
14	Dengî şwanî dillsoz (the voice of sincere grazer)	Sulaymaniyah
15	Dengî xellk (the voice of people)	Sulaymaniyah
16	Dengî Yekgirtû (united)	Sulaymaniyah
17	Dengî Zanko	Sulaymaniyah- Ranye
18	Derbendîxan (a city)	Sulaymaniyah- Derbendîxan
19	Hamûn (name of a place)	Sulaymaniyah
20	Lawan (youths)	Sulaymaniyah
21	Margirêt (Margret)	Sulaymaniyah
22	Medenyet (civilization)	Sulaymaniyah
23	Mellbendî rêkxistin (a party organization)	Sulaymaniyah
24	Meşxellan (torches)	Sulaymaniyah
25	Mîlodî (melody)	Sulaymaniyah
26	Mîlodî- orkêstirayî mindallan (Melody- children Orchestra)	Sulaymaniyah
27	Music	Sulaymaniyah
28	Nabînayan (blinds)	Sulaymaniyah
29	Nalya (Kurdish name)	Sulaymaniyah
30	Newa (Kurdish name)	Sulaymaniyah
31	Newa Mîwzîk (Newa Music)	Sulaymaniyah
32	Newxo (interior)	Sulaymaniyah
33	NNA music	Sulaymaniyah
34	Parêzgaran (conservatives)	Sulaymaniyah
35	Radyoy baban (Baban Radio)	Sulaymaniyah
36	Radyoy mindallan (children radio)	Sulaymaniyah
37	Radyoy pirjan (Kurdish name)	Sulaymaniyah
38	Raperrîn (uprising)	Sulaymaniyah- Ranye
39	Rewa (rightful)	Sulaymaniyah
40	Tewary Germiyan (Germiyan area)	Germiyan
41	X FM	Sulaymaniyah

42	Xak (Land)	Sulaymaniyah
43	Xendan (Kurdish name)	Sulaymaniyah
44	Yekgirtû (united)	Sulaymaniyah-Çemçemall
45	Zankoy Slêmanî (Sulaymaniyah University)	Sulaymaniyah

Dhok province:

	Name	Place
1	Amêdî (Kurdish city)	Dhok- Amêdî
2	Aştî (peace)	Dhok- Zaxo
3	Behdînan (a Kurdish area)	Dhok
4	Berderieş (a town)	Dhok- Berderieş
5	Çyay şengal (a mountain)	Şengal
6	Dasîna (Kurdish name)	Dhok
7	Dengî komell (the voice of KIG- Kurdistan Islamic Group)	Dhok
8	Dengî Şengal	Şengal
9	Dengî Yekgirtû (united)	Dhok
10	Dhok	Dhok
11	Dhok Traffic Police	Dhok
12	Duban	Dhok
13	Elquran Elkerîm (the holy Quran)	Dhok
14	Hîzl (Kurdish name)	Dhok
15	Jîn (life)	Dhok
16	Klasîk (classic)	Dhok
17	Lawan (youths)	Dhok
18	Metîn (a mountain)	Dhok
19	Peyam (message)	Dhok- Akrê
20	Radyoy akrê (Kurdish city)	Dhok- Akrê
21	Sîlaf (Kurdish town)	Dhok- Amêdî
22	Vîn (love)	Dhok
23	War (homeland)	Dhok
24	Xabûr (name of a river)	Dhok- Zaxo
25	Yekgirtû (united)	Dhok
26	Zanko (university)	Dhok

Source: Emîn (2015); Xizir (2012)

Appendix 3: Kurdish terrestrial television stations in the Kurdistan Region (2015)

Erbil province:

	Name	Place
1	Aro (Kurdish name)	Erbil
2	Aso sport (horizon sport)	Erbil
3	Azadî sport	Erbil
4	Azadî TV (freedom)	Erbil
5	Bangewaz	Erbil
6	Byaban (Desert)	Erbil
7	Byaban Music	Erbil
8	Bzûtnewey îslamî (IML) (Islamic Movement)	Erbil
9	Çare HD (solution)	Erbil
10	Cemawer (People)	Erbil
11	Cîhan (World)	Erbil
12	Çra (Light)	Erbil
13	Cudî	Erbil
14	D channel	Erbil
15	Dasîna	Erbil
16	Dîmukrasî (Democracy)	Erbil
17	Effect	Erbil
18	Êsta (now)	Erbil
19	Fîçer vîjn (feature vision)	Erbil
20	Gelî kurdistan (People of Kurdistan-Erbil)	Erbil
21	Gelî Kurdistan (People of Kurdistan-Koye)	Erbil- koye
22	Hana (Kurdish name)	Erbil
23	Hetaw (Sun)	Erbil
24	Îfêkt (Effect)	Erbil
25	Komellî îslamî (Islamic group)	Erbil- Soran
26	Kurdistan sport	Erbil
27	Kurdiya	Erbil
28	Lar (slanted)	Erbil
29	Law (youths)	Erbil
30	Mix Media	Erbil
31	Mnare (beacon)	Erbil
32	Newroz (Kurdish first day of year)	Erbil
33	Nîga (Kurdish name)	Erbil
34	Nîgay mindallan (Niga for children)	Erbil
35	Nîşitmanî min	Erbil
36	Nîwlayn (Newline)	Erbil
37	Paytext (Capital)	Erbil
38	Peyam (Message)	Erbil
39	Qellat (citadel)	Erbil
40	Roda (a name)	Erbil
41	Soran tîvî (Kurdish city)	Erbil- Soran

42	Spêde (morning)	Erbil
43	Yekgirtû (united)	Erbil
44	Yekgirtû (united)	Erbil- Soran
45	Zanayan	Erbil

Sulaymaniyah province:

	Name	Place
1	Ayinde (Future)	Sulaymaniyah-Kelar
2	Azadî (freedom)	Sulaymaniyah
3	Baban (Kurdish name)	Sulaymaniyah
4	Bzûtnewey îslamî (IMK) (Islamic movement)	Sulaymaniyah
5	Falcon eye	Sulaymaniyah
6	Gelî Kurdistan (People of Kurdistan)	Sulaymaniyah
7	Gelî Kurdistan Sport (People of Kurdistan sport)	Sulaymaniyah
8	Jîwa (Kurdish name)	Sulaymaniyah-Halabja
9	Komellî îslamî (Islamic group)	Sulaymaniyah- Ranye
10	Komellî îslamî (Islamic group)	Sulaymaniyah-Germyan
11	Komellî îslamî (Islamic group)	Sulaymaniyah-Pêncuyn
12	Perwerde (Education)	Sulaymaniyah
13	Raperrîn (Uprising)	Sulaymaniyah- Ranye
14	Slêmanî (Sulaymaniyah)	Sulaymaniyah
15	Sport TV	Sulaymaniyah
16	Sunnet	Sulaymaniyah
17	Xak (Land)	Sulaymaniyah
18	Xor (Sun)	Sulaymaniyah
19	Yekgirtû (united)	Sulaymaniyah- Ranye
20	Yekgirtû (united)	Sulaymaniyah
21	Zankoy slêmanî (Sulaymaniyah university)	Sulaymaniyah

Dhok province:

	Name	Place
1	Aza (Brave)	Dhok
2	Azadî (Freedom)	Dhok
3	Çwarçra (name of an arena)	Dhok- Zaxo
4	Dhok	Dhok
5	Gelî Kurdistan (people of Kurdistan)	Dhok
6	Kurdsat	Dhok
7	Newroz (Kurdish first day of new year)	Dhok
8	Peyam (Message)	Dhok
9	Spêde (Morning)	Dhok
10	War sport (homeland sport)	Dhok
11	Xabîr (name of a river)	Dhok- Zaxo
12	Duban M.TV	Dhok - Smêll
13	Delal	Dhok- Zaxo
14	Zaxo	Dhok- Zaxo
15	Yekgirtû (united)	Dhok
16	Dasîna	Dhok

Source: Emîn (2015); Xizir (2012)

Appendix 4: Iraqi Kurdish satellites broadcasting in Iraq

	Satellite	Date	Place	Financier	Language (s)
1	Kurdistan TV	17 Jan. 1999	Erbil	KDP	Multi
2	KurdSat	1 Jan. 2000	Sulaymaniyah	PUK	Multi
3	Zagros (name of mountain)	12 Jun. 2005	Erbil	KDP	Kurdish
4	VIN (Love)	15 Jul. 2007	Dhok	Private Sector	Kurdish
5	KANAL4	Apr. 2009	Erbil	Private Sector	Kurdish
6	KOREK (name of mountain)	2009	Erbil	private sector (Korek Telecom)	Kurdish
7	Peyam (message)	1 Dec. 2008	Sulaymaniyah	KIG	Kurdish
8	Spêde (morning)	2008	Erbil	KIU	Kurdish
9	Jamawar (people)	2007	Sulaymaniyah	KSDP	Kurdish & Arabic
10	Gelî Kurdistan (the people of Kurdistan)	1 Jul. 2008	Sulaymaniyah	PUK	Kurdish
11	Kirkuk (name of a city)	3 Sep. 2011	Kirkuk	PUK	Multi
12	Badînan (name of a Kurdish area)	17 Aug. 2012	Dhok	PUK	Kurdish & Arabic
13	KNN (Kurdish News Network)	2007	Sulaymaniyah	CM	Kurdish & Arabic
14	NRT (Nalia Radio & TV)	17 Feb. 2011	Sulaymaniyah	Private Sector (Nalia Company)	Kurdish
15	Hewlêr (Erbil)	13 Mar. 2011	Erbil	Private Sector	Kurdish
16	Pêlîstank (swallow)	30 Apr. 2012	Dhok	Private Sector	Kurdish
17	Kurdsat news	5 Mar. 2014	Sulaymaniyah	PUK	Kurdish
18	Rega TV (the road)	2012	Erbil	KCP	Kurdish
19	NRT2 (Nalia Radio & TV)	20 Feb. 2013	Sulaymaniyah	Private Sector (Nalia Company)	Kurdish
20	Rudaw TV (event)	2013	Erbil	KDP	Kurdish
21	Rabûn (awaking)	29 May 2012	Erbil	IMK	Kurdish
22	Amojgarî (advice)	Sept. 2013	Sulaymaniyah	Islamic Salafis Group	Kurdish and Arabic
23	War (homeland)	2013	Dhok	Private Sector	Kurdish
24	Net TV	2013	Erbil	Private Sector	Kurdish
25	Kurd max	2014	Erbil	Private Sector	Kurdish
26	Kurd max Pepule	2014	Erbil	Private Sector	Kurdish

Source: Emîn (2015); Source: Xizir (2012); Eħmed (2011); Fethwallh (2007)

Appendix (5): Biographical details of interviewees

Ehmed Reşîd Mîre



He was born in 1975 in Sulaymaniyah city and received a MA degree in Kurdish language, in 2008, from the University of Baghdad. Mîre has been working for *Lvîn* magazine since 2002 and currently he is the owner and manager of *Lvîn* Company for publishing and editor-in-chief of *Lvîn* magazine and the online news site *Lvinpress.com*. Besides that, he is a lecturer at the University of Halabja and has won many training prizes from IWPR, Press Now and NDI. Mîre has been detained several times because of his journalistic work.

Dana Es'ed



He was born on 26 April 1979 in Kirkuk, and he is the editor-in-chief of *Awene.com* online news site. Es'ed graduated from the media department at the University of Sulaymaniyah and he worked from 1996-2002 as a freelance journalist. Then he joined *Hawllatî* newspaper and remained with this newspaper until 2006. In the years, 2008 and 2009, Es'ed worked as a reporter of *Aswat Al-Iraq* (voices of Iraq) news agency and in the meantime, he was writing reports for *Niqash* (debate) magazine. He is proficient in Kurdish, Arabic, English and Turkish.

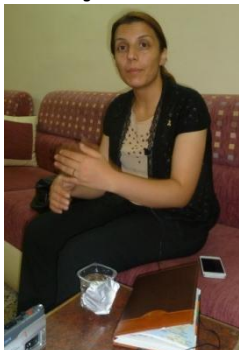
Heyder Cemîl Muhemmed Sallî



He was born in 1977 in Erbil city and has been working in media since 1992. Sallî is currently the editor-in-chief of *Kurdiu.org* online news site, which is affiliated to the Islamic Union of Kurdistan and also works as a social researcher. He graduated from the sociology

department at the University of Salahaddin in Erbil in 1999, and he has worked as editor-in-chief of *Yekgirtû* (union) newspaper (2004-2008) and editing manager of *Peyam* (message) magazine and was a presenter of a program in *Spedê* (morning) on satellite TV.

Hana Şwan Ĥesen



She was born in 1978 and graduated from the theatre department at the Fine Arts Institution in Sulaymaniyah. Ĥesen started working in media in 1997 in the women's press. She is currently editor-in-chief of *Rêwan* (guide), which is a bi-monthly newspaper and specializes in women's affairs, and in the meantime, she is a member of the higher committee of KJS, Sulaymaniyah branch. She has also worked as a program presenter on TV.

Hevall Ebubekir



He was born in 1971 in Sulaymaniyah city and has a PhD in Kurdish literature and journalism from the University of Sulaymaniyah. Ebubekir has worked for *Kurdistanî Nwê* (new Kurdistan) newspaper since 1992, and then in the late 1990s he started working for *Herê m* (region), the government newspaper. He is a lecturer at the University of Sulaymaniyah and supervises the university's academic magazine for humanitarian sciences. Moreover, he has written 15 books about journalism and has been appointed as an expert by the court of Sulaymaniyah for many media lawsuits.

Hiwa Osman



He was born in 1973 in Erbil. Osman is a former advisor to the former President Jalal Talaabni and has been working as a journalist and a specialist in media development since 2002. Osman held a number of senior positions and worked as a media advisor for President Jalal Talabani for three years. He established the Iraqi president's press office and website. In addition to his work as a media consultant, he is a prominent commentator on Iraq. He keeps an opinion blog on Iraqi politics and media in English, Arabic and Kurdish (www.hiwaosman.com). His writings are widely syndicated in both Kurdish and Arabic in Iraqi papers and websites. Before and during the 2003 war in Iraq, Osman was a producer and reporter for the BBC. He later helped set up the Iraq office of the International NGO, the Institute for War and Peace Reporting, and served as the lead trainer and later the country director. In May 2012, he received an award for "outstanding contribution to new media" by the international council for press and broadcasting in London. Currently Osman works as a media developer and consultant, both internationally and locally, and supervises the Mediawawan foundation for media training.

Kemal Reuf



He was born in 1962 in Sulaymaniyah city and currently runs *Shar* (city) Foundation for Media and he is the editor-in-chief of *Shar* magazine and Sharpress (sharpres.net) online news site. Reuf has worked, in his youth, in the printing sector and has participated in the issuing of *Dengî krêkar* (the voice of the workers) magazine in the 1980s in Sulaymaniyah. In the aftermath of the uprising of 1991, he contributed in issuing the *Azadî* (freedom) magazine and in founding two printing houses. Besides, in 2004, in Canada he issued the quarterly Citizen publication and he was editor-in-chief of the independent *Hawllatî* newspaper from 2008-2013.

Khaled Sulaiman



He was born in 1971 and has twenty years' experience in the print media as a columnist and reporter with several Kurdish and Arabic newspapers. Sulaiman has a diploma degree in theatre direction from the Sulaymaniyah Institute of Fine Arts. He also worked as the director of *Rêga* (road) radio station from 1994-1995, and columnist and reporter for several Kurdish and Arabic newspapers for example, *Rêgay Kurdistan* weekly newspaper (1992-1995), *Kurdistanî Nwê* (new Kurdistan) daily newspaper from 1993 to the present and *Al-Hayat* newspaper in London, *Assafir* and *Almustaqbal* Arabic newspapers. From 2010-2011 he worked as the editor-in-chief of *Heftane* (weekly) magazine and later became director of the *Xendan* centre for national studies. He is currently lead trainer of the Independent Media Centre in Kurdistan (IMCK) and works as a columnist for the *Kurdistanî Nwê* daily newspaper. Besides, he has written and co-written seven books in Kurdish and Arabic and he is proficient in Kurdish, Arabic, French and English.

Nyaz 'Ebdulla



She was born in 1981 in Kirkuk city and has a BA degree in media from the University of Salahaddin in Erbil. 'Ebdulla has been working in media since 2004, when she became a reporter for *Hawlatî* newspaper and she is currently working as a reporter and program presenter for *Radio Nawa*.

Sara Qadir



She was born in 1980 in Sulaymaniyah city. She has a MA degree in media and journalism and currently she is a lecturer at the media department of the University of Sulaymaniyah and works as a journalist for *Awêne* independent newspaper. Qadir has also worked for Hawlatî newspapers, Sbeiy (tomorrow) online news site (sbeiy.com) and other media outlets.

Serdar Muḥemed



He was born in 1965 in Sulaymaniyah city. Muḥemed has a BA in history from the University of Baghdad from 1992-1993 and he is proficient in Kurdish, Arabic and Persian. He worked as a member of the editorial board of Hawlatî (citizen) the first independent printed newspaper in the Kurdistan region from 2000 to 2005. In 2009, Muḥemed started working as managing editor for the weekly independent newspaper *Awêne* (mirror) and then he became vice editor-in-chief of the newspaper, staying in this post until 2012. He currently works as the editor-in-chief of *Awêne* newspaper. Also, he has participated in training courses of the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) in 2003 and Press Now in 2005 in Sulaymaniyah.

Şwan Muḥemed



He was born in 1964 in Sulaymaniyah city and has 22 years of journalistic experience. Muḥemed currently is the owner and director of Spee (white) foundation for media and training, editor-in-chief of *Spee* magazine and *Spee Media* (speemedia.com) online news site. Also, since the year 2000, he has been working as a correspondent for Agence France Press for news (AFP). He is one of the founding members of Hawllatî independent newspaper and then he became editor-in-chief of the *Awêne* newspaper for more than 4 years. He has worked in TV for 5 years and graduated from the media department at the University of Sulaimanityah.

Sîrwan Xerîb Eḥmed



He was born in 1976 in Sulaymaniyah and he is currently editor-in-chief of Xendan online news site. In 1996, he began working in media in Azadi TV (freedom). Eḥmed has worked for Hawllatî, the first Kurdish independent newspaper for 6 years, before moving on to contribute to the establishing of the *Awêne* independent newspaper. He was the founding member of the NRT satellite TV in 2010, and has worked as the manager of its newsroom.

Appendix (6): Interview questions and responses

Interview main questions:

Section one: general questions about the media in the Kurdistan region:

Question1: How do you evaluate the development of the Kurdish mass media; is it systematic development or chaotic? In your opinion, is there a real independent media in the Kurdistan region?

Question2: Have mass media outlets in the Kurdistan region served society and citizens? If so, in what respect? What fields do you suggest mass media outlets focus on?

Question3: Have the mass media outlets in the Kurdistan region implemented their essential functions?

Question4: In your opinion, which mass media medium is more credible of those belonging to the ruling parties, opposition parties or the independent outlets? In your opinion, which type is more popular and why?

5- How do you define the independent media (private sector, none partisan or free media) in Kurdistan? Do you think this type of media exists in the Kurdistan region? If so, of what types of channels is it comprised? What are its problems? How can it be improved?

6- In your opinion, what type of mass media outlets are the most influential in Kurdish society: online, TV, radio or printed media? Why?

Question7: How do you assess the relationship between journalists and officials? Is it based on professional criteria or on personal and mutual interests?

Question8: Have the governmental and partisan officials become a news source for journalists? Are they cooperating with them? What do you suggest for regulating the relationship between journalists and authorities?

Question9: In your opinion, what are the most prominent criticisms that Kurdish journalists have of the local authority and what are the Kurdish authorities' criticisms of journalists? What demands do both sides have from each other?

Question10: Who do you think are more reliable and professional in their work: the parties' affiliated journalists (both the ruling and the opposition parties) or the independents?

Question11: In terms of freedom of media work, which journalists are freer and have more space?

Question12: In your opinion, the journalists of which media type are more accessible to information? Are there differences in the proportion of violations against journalists of different media types in terms of ownership?

Question13: What are the most prominent differences among media outlets of the independent (private sector), ruling and opposition parties and the 'shadow media'? Does the existence of such differences affect the performance of journalists in these mass media types?

Question14: Do you believe that the Kurdistan region's authorities intentionally violate journalists' rights? If so, what are the reasons?

Question15: In your opinion, what are the most prominent obstacles of journalism in the Kurdistan region? Is there any pressure on journalists? Where does it come from? To what extent do they affect journalism and the performance of journalists? What do you suggest for overcoming the constraints of journalistic work and improving journalism in general?

Question16: To what extent do you think that the laws of Presswork, Accessing information and Preventing the Misuse of communication tools have regulated mass media sector in the Kurdistan region? Have they led to the regulation or to limitation of freedom of expression and media work? Do they have disadvantages on freedom of speech? If so, why?

Question17: Do you think that the Kurdistan Journalists Syndicate (KJS) and other journalistic bodies are effective and have roles in improving journalistic work? What benefits do they have for protecting journalists' rights? What do you suggest for more activity from these journalistic bodies?

Question18: Are there any conflicts among the different media outlets, those affiliated to political parties (both ruling and opposition) and independent media outlets? If so, are these conflicts based on professional competition or because of personal and partisan interests?

Question 19: To what extent do you consider that the Kurdish mass media has been successful in creating public opinion on subjects of common interests? What subjects are the Kurdish media mostly focusing on? What subjects do you suggest should be concentrated on by the media?

Question20: Do you believe that the courts in the Kurdistan region are fair in dealing with media lawsuits? How?

Question21: Do the academic departments in the universities and institutions in Kurdistan play the required role in improving and regulating the media sector professionally and how?

Question22: Do the media outlets have any role in promoting democracy in the Kurdistan region, and have they been able to function as the fourth estate? How and why?

Section two: questions about online journalism in the Kurdistan region

Question23: How has the internet affected media sector in the Kurdistan region? What are the advantages of the internet for Kurdish journalists?

Question24: Have traditional media outlets been able to take advantage of the internet? If so, how?

Question25: Do you think that online journalism has developed in Kurdistan? If so, what are the reasons?

Question26: Is it true that Kurdish journalism is heading towards being online and journalists in general prefer this type of mass media rather than working in traditional media?

Question27: To what extent has traditional media been affected by the development of online journalism? Do you think that in light of the evolution of online journalism, printed media is moving towards the end? How?

Question28: Do you believe that online journalism has led to a decay of professional and sober journalism in the Kurdistan region? If so, what are the reasons? What do you suggest for improving online journalism in the Kurdistan region?

Question29: Are there any obstacles and threats facing professional online journalism outlets? If so, are they technical or professional? What are the most prominent obstacles?

Question30: Is there any specific law for regulating online journalism in the Kurdistan region or it is dealt with through other laws?

Question31: Do you think that the relevant laws for journalism have influenced the development of online journalism? How?

Question32: Is there censorship on online journalism in the Kurdistan region? If so, what are they? How can they be overcome?

Question 33: In your opinion, censorship over which one is stronger: online journalism or traditional mass media?

Question34: Is there any difference in credibility of traditional media and of online mainstream sites? How? In your opinion, which one is the more reliable source for citizens?

Question35: What are the most prominent benefits of online journalism for Kurdish citizens in the region? Does online journalism have any drawbacks? If so, what are they?

Question36: Has online journalism helped in linking Kurds in the diaspora and in Kurdistan, and for serving Kurdish national issues? How?

Question37: In your opinion, what are the influences of Kurdish online journalism on the Kurdish culture, identity, discourse and language?

Section three: questions about the role of online journalism in freedom of expression and democracy in the Kurdistan region

Question38: Does online journalism have any role in creating public opinion on subjects of public interests? Can you provide an example of this?

Question39: To what extent does online journalism have an influence on strengthening freedom of expression in the Kurdistan region? How?

Question40: Has online journalism affected the process of democracy in the Kurdistan region? If so, in which aspect?

Question41: In your opinion, what online journalism should do in its working style for promoting freedom of expression and democracy in the Kurdistan region?

Question42: Has online journalism been able, through its characteristics, to provide citizens more space for freedom of speech and contribution to the debate on subjects of common interest? How? Can you provide an example?

Question43: Does online journalism have any role in the decision-making in the Kurdistan region? How? Can you provide an example?

Question44: In your opinion to what extent do social networking websites have an impact on freedom of expression and democracy in the Kurdistan region? How?

Question 45: Do social networking websites have an influence on creating public opinion and decision-making? How? Do you have any examples?

Question46: In promoting freedom of expression, which one is more influential: social networking websites or professional online mainstream sites? How?

Question47: How do you evaluate the relationship between online mainstream sites and social networking websites? Are they equal to each other or have negative influences on each other?

* Questions (1, 2, 3, 10, 11, 13, 14, 17, 18, 19, 21, 24, 26, 31, 34, 35, 36, 40 and 47) not translated because they were asked only to help in developing and clarifying other questions as mentioned in chapter methodology.

Interview responses

Appendix 6.1: transcript of interview with Eħmed Reşîd Mîre Editor-in-chief of *Lvîn* magazine and *Lvinpress.com*

23/7/2013

General questions about the media in the Kurdistan region:

Response: Question 4: The main duty of the media for those in power, obviously, is presenting the positive side of the ruling system, while the opposition media's main duty is to criticize the powerful and present negative aspects. According to the ruling parties' media, the Kurdistan region is paradise and according to the opposition media, Kurdistan is hell. Concerning the shadow media, I believe it is a kind of spying media in a society. In my opinion, the only serious media that conducts its duties independently and has an independent financial source is the independent media. This type of media in the Kurdistan region has always been at the forefront and has had a significant effect on society.

Response: Question 5: Independent media has an effective and strong presence. In my opinion, we should define the free or private sector media in the Kurdistan region depending on the experiences not due to the media theories. I believe a free media in Kurdistan is that media which has an independent media discourse and relies on independent finance sources such as its income from sales and advertisements and international NGOs subsidies. Additionally, its staff maintain the principles of professionalism, accuracy, courage, and have a general knowledge.

Journalists in the Kurdistan region, especially those who are working for independent media outlets, have safety problems, and they even face physical elimination in some cases and the power elite have an aggressive view towards the independent and opposition media. Besides, the Presswork law does not apply for all media lawsuits from the judicial system and police institutions. In the meantime, poor financial capacity poses a significant barrier since the circulation of printed media has declined because of the development of online journalism on the one hand and the high proportion of illiteracy on the other. Moreover, journalists suffer from a lack of professionalism, and reporting about some critical subjects on religious, ethnic, societal and other subjects, is considered a red line for the journalists. Another problem is that the independent media suffers from financial problems and there is no legislation from parliament for supporting the independent media in Kurdistan. Finally, the Kurdish society in the present day suffers from the high rate of illiteracy, which accordingly affects the financial income of the media.

To develop the independent media I believe it is necessary that the journalists and the businessmen in Kurdistan realize that the media beside it is a professional function, it is business at the same time. Besides, we should work on motivating people to read newspapers and pay for obtaining it.

Response: Question 6: Since a high proportion of illiteracy dominates Kurdish society, therefore printed media has the minimum influence. In my opinion, television has the maximum impact on society.

Response: Question 7: The relationship is unhealthy and depends on the extent that the journalists and politicians benefit from each other. Besides, the politicians always want to use the media, especially the private media sector for their own favour.

Response: Question 8: No doubt, the politicians are the main source for the media. If the journalists know the friendship techniques, they will be able to get more information from the politicians. Yet, one reason for providing journalists in independent media with information from the politicians is due to competition among the political parties and among different wings of the same party.

The relationship between journalists and politicians can be regulated through increasing the media knowledge among the Kurdish politicians, because they believe that the best politicians should talk to the media but give less information. We, as journalists, should work on changing this conviction of the Kurdish politicians and persuading them that a good politician should talk and provide necessary information as much as society needs.

Response: Question 9: Journalists often criticize the powerful for their abstaining from providing journalists with information, lack of transparency in financial and management aspects, the monopoly of the powerful by two particular parties, not working on improving journalists' life conditions and the lack of public services for citizens. In contrast, the powerful elite always criticize journalists, especially from the independent media, because they show only the negative side of events, they play a role in the deterioration of national security and in the chaos of society. Besides, they accuse journalists of being foreign intelligence agents.

Response: Question 12: In some cases when the information relates to public services, the power parties' media can get it effortlessly, while the independent media have easier access to important and sensitive information as such information is redline for the power's media and it may cause problems for them. Even the politicians do not provide their party's media with such information. Journalists from the independent media can get confidential information easily, whereas the ruling parties' journalists only get general information especially that which relates to public services.

In general, partisan journalists are living in grace and they don't have serious problems; they do not make any effort to get interesting information, they have good salaries and permanent jobs.

Response: Question 15: I believe that very similar barriers to those of the independent media are impeding media work in the Kurdistan region overall. For example, there are safety obstacles and financial problems. Moreover, recently, another issue has emerged which is expelling journalists from media outlets without considering the journalists' rights.

To improve the situation of the media, I think we need a civil law, altering political attitudes and culture dissemination in society, since we also have a culture barrier, not only political.

Response: Question 16: I believe none of these laws has had any role in regulating media in the Kurdistan region; on the contrary, they are a reason for the media chaos. Regarding their role in the limitation of the media's free work, I do not believe they have a negative role, but the problem is that the laws are not implemented properly in

the courts and still Iraqi's old penal law number 433 is in effect, which allows the detention of journalists for their work. For example, I currently have this problem. The president of the Kurdistan region has opened a lawsuit against me according to Iraqi penal law. So I am asking if the president does not implement Kurdistan law, who will do that? Besides, the implementation of the Presswork law and other related laws in the cities is different. For example, in Sulaymaniyah city this law is implemented better than in Erbil. Even the treatment of the police and the judges with journalists is better in Sulaymaniyah. In Erbil, the breach of press law is more noticeable.

Response: Question 20: Not absolutely, but I wonder if a judge hangs a picture of the president on the wall in his room, how he can be independent towards someone who has written against the president? Unfortunately, our judges, especially in Erbil and Dhok cities, are often appointed based on their loyalty to the ruling parties. That is why most of them are not independent with their decisions on the lawsuits.

Response: Question 22: In my belief, wherever a real media is found, there will be a solid democracy. We, as the independent media, have made the authorities get used to and listen to loud and rough voices. Therefore, if there is a democracy in the Kurdistan region, it is due to the fear of the media, because the media worldwide is a serious monitor on the process of democracy. Even some of the senior officials in the Kurdistan region have admitted that if they want to show that there is a kind of democracy in the region, they say that our media makes caricatures of the political figures.

Questions about online journalism in the Kurdistan region

Response: Question 23: We have to evaluate internet development in the Kurdistan regions according to phases. For example, in the aftermath of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003, the development of the internet is noticeable and has had an increasing impact on the media. However, there is an important point, which is that Kurdish society in general is an illiterate society and the extent of the internet's influence on such societies is too little. The internet's benefits for journalists are speed, easy access to information and photos, better coverage of events and more importantly, expanding the scope of spreading news and exceeding borders all over the world.

Response: Question 25: Online journalism in the Kurdistan region has developed noticeably for many reasons. It is affordable and it has facilitated the access to information and media coverage. Moreover, it has become a vital part of a global new tradition and culture in the context of globalization. It is an important tool for humans to express themselves and show its presence, and finally using it is easy and effortless and does not need a high level of education for users.

Response: Question 27: In the past, the Kurdish websites, including online newspapers were only working on political life, while in the present day they deal with all details of life. It has become a main source for public services and has displaced other classic mass media outlets in this regard. Nevertheless, we cannot say it will ultimately

replace printed or visual media. Each mass media outlet has its own features. I believe, in any society, whenever the audiences of online newspapers increase, the extent of relying on the printed media as a reliable source will increase. For example, if a modest printed media, with a circulation of a few thousand, published news about someone, the psychological effects of this news will be much more compared to the same news if published in an online news site with tens of thousands of readers. In other words, if *Lvîn* printed magazine, for instance, has a circulation of seven thousand and published news of a senior political figure, its impact will be much more if the same news was posted in the *Lvînpress* online news site, which has an advance ranking among the Iraqi online websites, or on our page on Facebook, which has more than two hundred thousand fans.

Response: Question 28: There is no special law for online journalism and this has given an opportunity to the websites and online news sites to override all the criteria and standards, as they want. Online journalism in the Kurdistan region suffers from a deep lack of professionalism, since this type of media has no specific law. Besides, because of the absolute freedom of the internet, many of the website supervisors have misused this feature of the internet. For example, if we look to the news and reports on these websites, we see that most of them have no clear or reliable source.

Response: Question 29: The most prominent barrier to online journalism is technical problems. In the Kurdistan region, we still depend on neighbour countries for the Internet supply and often its quality is poor. Our local Internet companies are not capable of providing an Internet service that can bear high loads. Often, when a website has a heavy load from the browsers, it may stop working. Besides, there is hacking threat to the online news sites. For example, our online news site *Lvînpress* has faced hacking attempts many times, which constitutes a serious problem to online journalism. Moreover, lack of professionalism is a very prominent obstacle in this type of journalism.

Response: Question 30: There is no special law for online journalism and it is not being dealt with by other journalism laws. For example, so far, there are no lawsuits against the *Lvînpress* online news site. If anyone wants to sue the website, they will open a lawsuit against me because they know that I am the manager of the company, which runs the website.

Response: Question 32: There is only self and moral censorship in these professional online news sites.

Response: Question 33: There is a heavy censorship on the Kurdish traditional media, while in terms of the professional online news sites there is only a moral and self-censorship. In the meantime, many websites are not professional and post everything without caring about anything.

Response: Question 37: In terms of the Kurdish language, in general the Kurdish media have played a negative role. I believe one of the tasks of the media is improving the language, though the Kurds online journalism could not participate in developing and

improving the language or even keeping it up to what it is. Whereas concerning culture, I think overall, online journalism has played an important role, especially, in cultural exchange and presenting Kurdish culture to other nations.

Questions about the role of online journalism with freedom of expression and democracy in the Kurdistan region

Response: Question 38: In general, mass media outlets including online news sites are not effectively capable of creating public opinion in an illiterate society. Nevertheless, in some phases during some prominent events, to an extent the online news sites have played effective roles in mobilizing society especially for mass demonstrations. For example, according to studies during the Arab spring, online media, including online news sites and social networking websites, mobilized the people against the ruling systems.

Response: Question 39: Certainly, online journalism has a significant impact on promoting freedom of speech because it exceeds censorship; it is more open than the traditional media outlets and has fewer responsibilities. The lack of legal responsibility sometimes allows more work, which by this, in turn affects positive free expression.

Response: Question 41: I believe it is necessary to promote journalism ethics. Journalists should ask for a law for online journalism so they can commit to it. Besides, journalists should maintain in journalism credibility, since most of what the online news sites post is not their own material and they copy from other websites or media outlets. This has become a phenomenon among the Kurdish online news sites and websites, and most of them steal footage, images and texts from each other. If we have a special law for online journalism that prevents such a phenomenon, I believe online journalism can be promoted.

Response: Question 42: I believe, one of the positive points of online journalism is that when the audiences browse a website, they feel that they are the owner because they are able to express their opinion on the website. However, this allowance for all browsers to express an opinion on a news site, report or article has created a problem where they sometimes exceed public morals. Many audiences evaluate what has been posted on online news sites according to their political affiliation. If they like the post, they leave positive feedback, if not, they do not hesitate to insult the editors and the owner of the website.

Response: Question 43: In general, mass media has a significant role; however, if we compare online journalism to other traditional media outlets, we cannot claim that it has had that role. I believe in the recent period, especially in the aftermath of the demonstrations of 17 February 2011 in Kurdistan, online news sites have started to leave an impact on society and have become audible.

Response: Question 44: In a positive trend, I believe that social networking websites have a significant role in promoting freedom of speech in the Kurdistan region. One of the keys that has made the two ruling parties (KDP and PUK) to be more open to the public, is because of the social websites that cannot be controlled and repulsed. It is

costless and does not need a big staff of journalists where only one person with a laptop can post whatever he wants. In fact, this situation has participated in fostering free media work.

Response: Question 45: In general, yes, the social networking websites have made a contribution in creating public opinion for a simple reason, which is that these websites are exceeding all obstacles. In my opinion, the existence of such media in an illiterate society is like arming all of the people without law, which eventually leads to chaos. It is true that every society is undergoing such a phase, where every citizen can say their own words publicly. But I believe such situations should only be allowed when such a society is healthy and the citizens completely realize what democracy and freedom of speech mean, and when there is a general commitment to public ethics, democratic standards and the public sphere. In the Kurdish society when such principles are absent, then such social media have negative influences.

Response: Question 46: If we make the level of credibility as a criterion of influence, we can say that online news sites are much more effective than the social networking websites. Nevertheless, in terms of spreading, I believe that social websites are the most widespread. People use the social networking websites much more because they have their own accounts and they can find themselves on these websites. In general, in our society, people have suffered from a lack of mediums to express themselves, therefore, now they can find themselves on these websites and writing whatever they want, which makes them feel the existence of their personality.

Appendix 6.2: transcript of interview with Dana Es'ed Editor-in-chief of *Awêne* (mirror) news (Awene.com) news website

21/7/2013

General questions about the media in the Kurdistan region

Response: Question 4: Certainly, the independent or private sector media outlets are more credible since they have no private interests. I believe, the most serious interest relates to financial subsidies, though in general this does not exist in the independent media. Thus, they work more credibly. A good example for this is *Awêne* newspaper, which supports the messages of a specific media foundation instead of any ideology, because it relies on its limited income and does not worry about subsidies being suspended. Consequently, the independent media has been able to criticize the powerful, the opposition, society, religion and other aspects at the same time; while a political party's media outlet cannot do so because of many considerations.

In terms of popularity, again, I believe the independent media is more popular. For instance, since the partisan media channels have high subsidies, they do not care about increasing their audience and circulation, but the independent media outlets such as *Awêne* newspaper should work for increasing its circulation otherwise it cannot

continue. The independent (private sector) media, especially the printed media can survive through their sales, which is why it tries hard to increase its audience.

Response: Question 5: In my opinion, the definition of the independent media is linked to the financial aspect. I believe any mass media outlet that is financially independent and does not rely on subsidies from the political parties, power or senior officials, is independent. Independent media should be in the middle and not biased to either power or the opposition.

Independent media has a presence in the general scene of the media in Kurdistan, but this presence is weak quantitatively because society still does not deal with the media as business. We could not turn media into a business. This is why it has no noticeable presence, though qualitatively it has a significant presence and considerable impact.

The independent media in the Kurdistan region mostly includes printed and online outlets because these two are cheaper than broadcast media. Finance always constitutes a serious problem for the independent media in Kurdistan. For example, years ago *Awêne* Company had four media outlets; a weekly newspaper, an entertainment magazine, a sport newspaper and an online news site, which, according to some polls were the best, but financial problems led to the closure of both the magazine and the sport newspaper. In contrast, partisan or the Shadow media does not have such a problem. In general, printed and online media costs less that is why they are more popular in the private sector media. Moreover, establishing and operating a satellite TV may cost millions of dollars, which is large capital. I seriously doubt that there is an independent satellite TV in Kurdistan that is operated independently by the private sector. We can talk only about NRT and ask is it independent or not.

Response: Question 6: In my opinion, TV and printed media are more effective than other types of media. The TV comes in first in terms of effectiveness. For example, the opposition TVs are the most influential since they have more audiences, where frequently they are angry audiences because of the power system and they can easily be mobilized by this TV. Then, printed media comes in second. It is true that this type of media and its circulation has declined and has a small proportion of readers in the Kurdistan region, though it is more influential on people than online media.

Response: Question 7: The relationship between journalists and officials is without doubt unhealthy. In the Kurdistan region, there is no real democracy. The same faces who were ruling in the 1990s, are ruling now, this makes these officials deal with journalism and journalists in unhealthy ways. They have an aggressive attitude towards the journalists and consider them as their enemy, especially journalists from the independent media. These officials want to remain in power and have many interests, so they often deal aggressively with journalists.

Despite this, our government is not institutional, thus in such governments the relationship among the four estates is unhealthy. For example, even the ministries

have no professional media department or a rational mouthpiece that can regulate their relationship with the media.

Response: Question 8: In the Kurdistan region, no one can access information. The reasons for this are many, but the most prominent reason is corruption, which has reached a high level. For example, no journalist can enter the ministry of natural resources of Kurdistan and ask for information about any oil contract. This situation has made the journalists resort to anonymity and unknown news sources. For this, they always have a justification, which is to refrain the officials from speaking or providing information or they may ask for not mentioning their names as a source. This is because they have fear since our government is not institutional and in such situations, all have fears of the government or the political parties that have dominated everything. This, in turn, sometimes makes the independent media outlets also fall into mistakes.

For improving this situation, I suggest drafting a new law for access to information or at least activating the current law since we have the problem of not implementing laws. Besides, it is necessary for every ministry to have a professional department with trained and qualified staff so they can regulate a proper relationship with journalists, facilitate their access to information and arrange for weekly or monthly press conferences.

Response: Question 9: The most prominent criticism from the power elite to the media is that of chaos. For example, if we take the president of the Kurdistan region, we see that whenever he talks about media, he says that there is chaos in the media sector in our country. Even if we, as media, talk about the extension of his presidential term, he considers this as chaos and against the supreme interests of Kurdistan. I believe that the most prominent accusation of the power elite to the independent and private sector media is that the media is chaotic and not professional. Even if this accusation presumably is true, I think it is because the interference and the influence of the political power has made the independent media move in this direction. Moreover, if we talked about the PUK and KDP affiliated media during the civil war in the 1990s, we see that they did even worse.

On the other hand, the main criticism of the journalists to the authorities is that they hide information and prevent journalists from access to information especially that relating to corruption. Besides, they do not care about the local media in the region, while they are fully respectful towards foreign journalists.

Response: Question 12: In general, the political parties affiliated journalists are more accessible to the information that serves a particular ideology, which is not important to the people. For example, when there is a press conference between Jalal Talabani and Masoud Barzani, only Kurdsat and Kurdistan TV satellite channels are allowed to cover the press conference, while frequently other media representatives are not allowed.

Journalists from the independent and opposition media are more vulnerable to violation. I believe that journalists of the opposition media are much more vulnerable to insults, beatings and physical elimination since they work for a specific ideology and mainly concentrate on criticizing those in power.

Response: Question 15: The most prominent problems of journalism in the Kurdistan region are lack of access to information, lack of government response to the journalists and lack of professionalism. Besides, there are pressures on the journalists; some of them are personal where the officials misuse their positions to threaten journalists. Other pressures come from the judicial system and the law, which is too flexible and is used improperly against journalists. The red lines that have been imposed by the power elite on the journalists have also created a self-censorship among journalists, which by its turn has made the journalists hesitate to work on some subjects.

The existence of such problems, has certainly affected the performance of the journalists. For instance, if in a lawsuit against *Awêne* newspaper, the court depended on the new Presswork law, sentencing *Awêne* with 10 million Iraqi Dinars (5000 Pound), then the newspaper would close because it cannot collect such amounts of money to pay.

Response: Question 16: The laws relating to the Presswork in general have led to limitations of the free media work. The problem is that in the Kurdistan region, the laws are passed but are not implemented. For example, in the new Presswork law No.35, there is an article that asserts to not arresting journalists, while many courts and police stations are still using the Iraqi penal law of 1969, thus journalists have been detained for days. Accordingly, there is always a technique for the courts and power system to detain journalists.

Response: Question 20: Sometimes the courts in the Kurdistan region are fair in dealing with journalism lawsuits and sometimes they are not. In many cases, the political parties influence the courts and sometimes they act independently.

Response: Question 21: Unfortunately, the academic departments in the universities and the institutions in the Kurdistan region have not had an effective role in improving journalism in our country because they have no proper curriculum and many of the lecturers are not well qualified. For example, for four years the students only studied old-fashioned theories and do not know how to write brief news, thus they work hard on their own to develop.

Questions about online journalism in the Kurdistan region

Response: Question 23: The internet has developed worldwide, including Kurdistan, and it has a significant proportion of audiences, much more than the printed media. In some cases, the internet has a positive impact on the printed media, but in many cases, it has a negative impact. The internet has evolved to an extent that it enabled citizens to use their smart phones to browse for online news sites, which means that henceforth they do not need printed newspapers.

For the journalists, the internet has brought many benefits, for instance, they can transfer and deliver information easier and faster and it is affordable and a low cost medium compared to the other mass media outlets.

Response: Question 25: To some extent online journalism has developed in the Kurdistan region, though compared to western countries, we are still underdeveloped. We could not perfectly take advantage of the Internet as a mass media tool. We are in need of training for improving the online news sites so we can use them in a perfect way for having the most impact on audiences.

Response: Question 27: In 2005, when *Awêne* newspaper was first published, its circulation was around 20,000, but now this number has declined to almost 4,000. This decline is because of the development of the internet. However, in my opinion the printed media will not end and instead, it will become a press for a particular elite in society.

Response: Question 28: Yes, I think that online journalism has led to a lack of professionalism and sober journalism in Kurdistan. For example, the printed newspapers and magazines have real addresses and known identities and they have enrolled in the journalists' syndicate, thus if they violate the press law or journalistic ethics, they may face lawsuits and courts. That is why this media is obliged to be professional to some extent. On the other hand, the online news sites can be found anywhere in the world and work and concentrate on Kurdistan affairs. In general, they do not care about being professional because they are out of reach and unaccountable. Many Kurdish websites have had a negative impact on the sober online news sites. In addition, social networking websites have had a negative effect on the sober online journalism.

Response: Question 29: One of the problems is the finance impediment. For example, designing *Awêne* online newspaper has cost almost 30,000 Dollars, which constitutes a significant financial load on the private sector media. Another problem is the technical aspect. We suffer from the lack of an online expert technician and this has made the majority of the Kurdish online newspaper designs poor. Besides, the lack of professionalism also is one of the problems of online journalism, especially for the private sector media since improving this aspect needs finance potentials.

In general, the threats to online journalism are less than other types of media. A Kurdish online news site can operate anywhere in the world without having a known identity, while the printed and broadcasted media channels should have known addresses. Nevertheless, sober and professional online news sites such as *Awêne* have known addresses and identities.

Response: Question 30: There is no specific law for dealing with online journalism lawsuits. It is usually dealt with in the context of other media laws.

Response: Question 32: In general, there is no censorship on online journalism, though, in case the online news sites have known identities and addresses, they may face the same censorship that exists in classic journalism and they deal with in the

context of Presswork law. Whereas the websites that operate abroad are not subject to any censors.

Response: Question 37: In general, the impact of online journalism on the culture, including language and identity are significant. This impact is much more obvious on the Kurds in the diaspora. For example, many Kurds of the new generation are born and get their education abroad, so if they have a connection with their original society, it is through these online sites.

Questions about the role of online journalism with freedom of expression and democracy in the Kurdistan region

Response: Question 38: I believe that online journalism has had an influence in creating public opinion, but the printed media is more influential. It is true that online news sites have much more of audience than the printed, but since online media is less reliable and less committed to journalistic ethics and violates copyrights and professionalism, thus it has less impact on creating public opinion.

Response: Question 39: Online journalism, including professionals and non-professionals, in addition to social network websites, has had significant impact on the promoting and expansion of freedom of speech. Besides, there are many Kurdish websites that have no restrictions, where people even can defame, insult and violate others' privacy. This means that online journalism has offered a broad space not only for sober criticisms, but also to the negative side of the freedom of speech.

Response: Question 41: I believe online journalism should commit to professional principles, especially because competing time and fast publishing news may lead to mistakes. In fact, what is said in online journalism in Kurdistan is not being said in printed media because in online sites, there is a broader space for freedom of speech and people can express their views even anonymously.

Response: Question 42: Online journalism has provided a considerable space for people to contribute in debating about common and public issues. Because of online journalism, today the audiences not only receive but they contribute in creating news and providing opinions. People in Kurdistan interact with online journalism through commenting, writing their opinions and criticizing reports and articles that post on the online news sites.

Response: Question 43: Only to a small extent. The crucial decisions are always taken in closed rooms. For example, the decision to extend the presidential term on 30 June 2013 was taken inside parliament's hall, despite many calls from the independent media against this. The crucial and important decisions are taken due to the interests of the power elite and the political parties and are not affected by any type of media, including online.

Response: Question 44: The social networking websites have had a considerable role in promoting freedom of expression. These websites have made people contribute in news production and provided opportunities for free expression. Through these

websites, people can now say their words, publish photos and footage, criticize and report.

Response: Question 45: Certainly, many pages and accounts have emerged in the social networking websites that have thousands of fans. People who have common interests gather around certain pages or accounts on the social networking websites, but the public opinion that creates in these websites, if it has not been supported by professional mass media outlets, often remains only in the virtual world.

Response: Question 46: I think people are freer in the social networking websites rather than in online news sites. In the professional online news sites, there are many standards and principles of work and overall they are committed to journalistic ethics, while there are no such commitments and standards in the social networking websites.

Appendix 6.3: transcript of interview with H  yder Cem  l M  hemed Sall   Editor-in-chief of KurdIU.org news website

25/7/2013

General questions about the media in the Kurdistan region

Response: Question 4: I believe the independent media channels are the most professional and work credible without bias. Then the opposition media comes, which usually says its words in any circumstances, while the media of the ruling parties are the less credible media. The worse type of media is the so-called Shadow media, which misleads people and creates chaos. In terms of the most popular mass media, I think it depends on the numbers and the circulation, which show the most daring broadcast channels and the best-seller newspapers and magazines have the biggest audiences.

Response: Question 5: It is a free and daring media. At the beginning, the private sector media was able to play an important role in the media scene. The staff of this private sector media are well-known people, who were able to talk about many sensitive issues that encouraged ordinary citizens also to do so. They work on an important message, which is freeing the Kurdish individuals from many constraints and breaking the fear that has been made by the powerful elite. I believe the presence of the independent media is relative. Besides, the Shadow media recognizes itself as an independent media to abuse the independent media.

Response: Question 6: Nowadays, online journalism has a prominent role since it is a multimedia medium and supported by the social networking websites. Moreover, the social networking websites have enabled online journalism to be faster and reach more audiences. I believe that online journalism is the most effective.

Response: Question 7: I think that journalists of the independent media are not allowed to approach the officials except for obtaining news and information or in cases when an official deliberately wants to leak information to the media. On the other

hand, journalists from ruling parties are always praising the officials from the government or from a specific political party.

Response: Question 8: Not really. They have not become a news source; it is the courage and daring of the journalists that enable them to obtain news and information from the officials. The officials in the Kurdistan region don't provide information to the journalists, only in the case that this serves their own interests in a political conflict. They provide information only for their own favour.

For regulating the relationship between journalists and officials, I suggest activating the new law of Access to Information and opening the closed doors for journalists in addition to ease their access to information, which is achieved only by reducing the routines.

Response: Question 9: The most prominent journalists' criticism of the authorities is the lack of transparency in the government departments. In contrast, the officials criticize journalists for their lack of professionalism, since in the present day there is a herd of non-professional journalists in the Kurdistan region.

Response: Question 12: No doubt, the journalists who work for ruling parties are more accessible to information because the ruling parties want to show their positive image through their affiliated journalists. Moreover, there are differences in the proportion of the violation against journalists' rights. It differs from one geographical area to another, for example, probably violations in Sulaymaniyah city are less than elsewhere. Besides, according to the media channels' affiliation, the proportion of violation varies. For instance, journalists from the opposition media are more vulnerable to violation than ruling parties' or independent media, because political competition among the political parties has been reflected in their media as well.

Response: Question 15: I can say that the biggest problem for journalists is the lack of information sources. This has made the journalists face many difficulties and be threatened. The lack of news sources, threats and other pressures are the biggest problems for the journalists in Kurdistan. The continuation of these problems has a negative impact on the journalists. For example, in some areas where there are fewer pressures, journalists perform and improve noticeably more than in areas where there are many obstacles and barriers to the journalists. This has made journalists turn to alternative journalism, which is online. Besides, the laws relating to the media work are elastic and not implemented properly. We have the Presswork law, while many journalists have been tried according to the Iraqi old penal law. This fact has brought chaos to Kurdish journalism.

My suggestion for overcoming these problems is activating the Presswork law, Access to Information law and the code of journalistic ethics.

Response: Question 16: If these laws enter into effect, then I believe they will benefit the journalists, though the journalists' ambitions are much more than these laws have provided. Unfortunately, these laws are violated and the courts do not deal with them, otherwise, the situation would be better.

Response: Question 20: No, they are not because the courts jump from one law to another. Besides, the courts are not independent and not professional in dealing with reality. The courts are connected to the political reality. This means that they detain a journalist for political reasons avoiding the Presswork law.

Response: Question 22: Yes, I believe the role of the media in promoting democracy is significant. For example, in the Kurdistan region, media has created the opposition. All over the world opposition parties create critical media, while in our country the independent media has encouraged some people and political parties to become opposition. Besides, it has been able to be the fourth estate in some phases.

Questions about online journalism in the Kurdistan region

Response: Question 23: It is a good chance for the Kurds to use the internet. Accessing the internet is easy, which enabled journalists to access information easier and this in turn has made the internet have a noticeable influence on Kurdish society and has become raw material for printed and broadcast media outlets.

Response: Question 25: Overall, online journalism in the Kurdistan region has developed. For example, in 1999 we had very few online sites, while nowadays we have numerous Kurdish online news sites that post various professional journalistic messages. The reason for this development is mainly the expansion of freedom in the country and to an extent, in addition, the growth of internet services, which is affordable to a large proportion of the people. The increasing number of internet companies has helped in the evolution of online journalism.

Response: Question 27: If we take into consideration the issue of declining sales of the printed media, this means that it has affected traditional media to a high extent. For example, if a specific newspaper or magazine has claimed that it has a 20,000 circulation, now the same newspaper or magazine claims that it has only 5,000. Probably this number will decline much more to reach 2,000. These printed media outlets have felt that their sales have sharply declined; therefore, they have resorted to online journalism to fill the gap. However, I think that printed journalism is not going to end, but it becomes weaker and marginalized.

Response: Question 28: No, I don't believe so, but online journalism has led to declining traditional media audiences. For example, when news or an article is published in a Kurdish sober printed newspaper, after only a few minutes it will be posted in the online version and this has made it that people do not need to go to the market to buy a newspaper. For improving online journalism, I believe we need a special law for this type of journalism so it can regulate its standards. This law should not restrict online journalism, but regulate it.

Response: Question 29: Yes, there are. For example, there are threats on the journalists that work for online news sites. The journalist is a journalist whether working in online journalism or other types of media. The authorities always have an aggressive view towards journalists. Another threat to online journalism is the hacking problem, and many hackers work for a certain political party. Another threat to online

journalism is that in general the Kurds have only a little knowledge about the best ways of using online journalism and its techniques.

Response: Question 30: There is no special law for dealing with online journalism and it is dealt with in the context of other laws, especially the law of preventing the improper use of cell phones and technology.

Response: Question 32 and 33: Censorship on online journalism is limited. There are some cases of threats and pressures on journalists in online journalism. Moreover, there is self-censorship, which is usually created when there are external threats.

Response: Question 36 and 37: Yes, but to a small extent. This is difficult, especially for the other parts of Kurdistan. The Kurds in Turkish Kurdistan use the Roman alphabet, in Iranian Kurdistan, they use the Persian alphabetic and in Syrian Kurdistan, the education is in Arabic. Only in Iraqi Kurdistan, the websites might connect the Kurds inside and outside the country together. In general, online journalism has served the Kurdish national issues such as working on the Kurdish language, although we do not have a unified language. Besides, it has served in creating public opinion against the threats that face Kurdistan. Overall, it has an impact in serving the Kurdish culture and language.

Questions about the role of online journalism with freedom of expression and democracy in the Kurdistan region

Response: Question 38: It has very positive effects, especially as people can access it very fast. For stirring public issues, online journalism has played a significant role and has gathered the people.

Response: Question 39: Certainly, online journalism has a very positive impact, because frequently the sources in online journalism are unknown. No doubt that in Kurdistan we have the problem of freedom of speech and who express his opinions freely, may face political, psychological and physical threats and pressures, though, since in online journalism the identity of the writers and the journalists could be anonymous, thus it is difficult to be prosecuted.

Response: Question 41: They should be professional in posting news and articles, credible and not biased to any party. They should work totally on promoting freedom of speech. Besides, I suggest that they concentrate on the topics that are important for society such as fighting corruption and lack of transparency. If they do so, then they will serve themselves, the citizens and the country.

Response: Question 42: Certainly, the citizens have become another source for news for online journalism since contacting between both is easy. Many citizens contribute by sending documents and events to the online news sites, which may constitute a good source for these websites.

Response: Question 43: To an extent, it has influenced decision-making. For example, senior officials of the Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU) decided to meet officials of the KDP to discuss the problem of burning the headquarters of the KIU in Dhok city in 2011,

though many of the supporters of the KIU contributed in a campaign against such a meeting, which made the officials of the KIU retreat from their decision.

Response: Question 44: The social networking websites have a significant impact on freedom of speech. This has made the Kurdish officials open accounts on these social networking websites, so they can keep up with the debates and people in these networks. I believe that social networking websites, especially Facebook is to be reckoned with, and has a positive and active role in promoting freedom of speech and democracy. Besides, there is no censorship in these social websites, only if the websites themselves remove a specific image or footage.

Response: Question 45: To an extent, they have a positive influence on creating public opinion because the users are capable of creating groups faster and easier and launch debates about particular issues. Thus, new opinions will emerge, which may affect the people at least on Facebook. For example, prior to the election of 21 September 2013, people contributed to debates on Facebook to boycott the election and campaigns were run for this purpose.

Concerning the political decisions, to an extent social networking websites have an impact because the officials from Kurdistan have created their own accounts and have become a part of these websites since they want to hear people's opinions and views. For example, on 24 February 2011, many activists on Facebook claimed that there would be demonstrating in Erbil city. This made the people prepare for this and in the meantime, the security forces deployed into the streets.

Response: Question 46: Social networking websites are much more influential in enhancing freedom of expression since there is a direct interactivity among people themselves, while online news sites, in general, mostly operate as a sender and the interactivity is less.

Appendix 6.4: transcript of interview with Hana Şwan Ėesen Editor-in-chief of *Rêwan* (guide) newspaper and member of the higher committee of KJS-Sulaymaniyah branch

27-8-2013

General questions about the media in the Kurdistan region

Response: Question 4: I am not with misleading the audience and this is achieved when the media channels declare their affiliations. For example, *Kurdistanî Nwê* (new Kurdistan) newspaper, has declared clearly that it belongs to the PUK, thus those who have different political views may not read this newspaper or may only be interested in some of its news and reports. It is important for the audience to know what they read and watch. For example, there are news websites that have commenced with a policy and then turned to another; this is deception. Another example is that the private

sector media began with a proper policy, though recently they also turned to work for their own interests and were involved in corruption.

I think the parties' affiliation media channels have more audiences than the private sector media because this later has almost a Yellow Journalism policy and concentrates on scandals rather than other issues. In terms of credibility, again we cannot deny that the partisan media channels take into their account credibility more than the private sector media do, and are committed to journalistic ethics. Meanwhile, we also cannot deny that the partisan media are working for a specific party and reflect its policy.

Response: Question 5: I seriously doubt about the existence of the independent media in Kurdistan. Most of the media outlets in our country hide their funding sources to mislead people about their affiliations. The private sector media channels when beginning, to an extent perform well, whereas after a while they become biased to a specific political official or party due to their interests.

In general, the private sector media rely on scandals, stirring topics and some events that create societal instability, which in my opinion for such media is unhealthy. The independent and private sector media channels in the Kurdistan region are mostly printed or online and there is no independent TV.

Response: Question 6: I believe television and radio are more effective than other media outlets because these two mass mediums reach all homes and audiences. Besides, it is easier for the audiences to be in touch with these two mediums and even illiterate people can benefit from them. For example, we have conducted a survey about the proportion of the *Rêwan* (guide), the women newspaper readers, and most of the participants preferred TV than newspaper, as many of them are illiterate.

Response: Question 7: Not applicable

Response: Question 8: They cooperate; especially after passing the law of Access to Information by Parliament, they are obliged to cooperate. On the other hand, we have to take into account that some journalists have damaged the image of journalists, which makes journalism in general lose its prestige and respect in society.

Response: Question 9: Journalists criticize the officials for lack of information and their abstaining from conducting direct interviews. Besides, a while ago journalists were criticizing the officials for their exaggerated interests and respect to foreign reporters and media correspondents, though this criticism has now abated. On the other hand, the officials criticize media channels and their journalists for altering their statements and information for their own favour. For example, on several occasions, newspapers and magazines have chosen a quotation from an official's statement or titles for their news reports that have not matched with the context. This is only for thrilling and to draw audiences' attention, which eventually reflect on the society. This makes many officials refrain from talking to some local media journalists.

Response: Question 12: I believe the parties' affiliated journalists have more opportunities for accessing information because they are closer to the officials of their

parties. Nevertheless, this also depends on the journalists' personalities, their effort in getting information and commitment to ethics.

In general, journalists from the private sector media are more vulnerable to violation, since to the present day in Kurdistan we have legal problems. For example, while we have our own Presswork law, in many cases the courts deal with media lawsuits according to the Iraqi Ba'athist regime of old penal law, which is very strict towards journalists. There is a conservative trend in the courts in Kurdistan, where they often use the old penal law. Thus, journalists from the private sector media, who mostly work on scandal issues, are more vulnerable to violation.

Response: Question 15: There are two types of problems; problems relating to the journalists themselves and others relating to the media channels. The problems that relate to the journalists are lack of professionalism, lack of commitment to journalistic ethics and copying some foreign models of journalistic working. On the other hand, the problems relating to the media outlets are lack of commitment towards their journalists' rights, not supporting and defending their journalists. These problems make the journalists feel that the situation of media in the Kurdistan region is always suspended.

I believe that there are no pressures on the journalists, but sometimes there are threats on the journalists. For example, when a journalist publishes a news story about a specific political party or a clan, this may cause threats to the journalist. These threats and obstacles have not caused a serious barrier that disables the journalists conducting their work; they probably make an obstruction for a while but not a permanent barrier.

I suggest that the organizations and associations that work for the journalists such as KJS should persuade the media channels to guarantee journalists' rights and duties because this helps both sides to be committed to each other and to the work.

Response: Question 16: Unfortunately, the serious problem is that although the laws are approved by parliament, they are not implemented. This means that neither society, nor the competent bodies are capable of being familiar with these laws. Many journalists are not familiar with their rights in the new laws so they cannot defend themselves. For example, today (27 August 2013) three journalists were being tried in court, according to the Iraqi old penal law, whilst we have our own new Presswork law. When we asked the judge about this defect he argued that for now that is all they have. Nobody follows up the implementation of the laws, which by its turn, has led to creating a serious problem for the journalists. The law of 'Preventing Improper use of the Cell Phone and New Technology' is another law that is not implemented in the courts. The lawsuits in this respect are also dealt with by the Iraqi old penal law. As a result, this situation has also led to a limitation of freedoms.

Response: Question 20: I don't think so because I have much evidence that the courts in the Kurdistan region are not fair in their decisions.

Response: Question 22: Certainly, it has influence in fostering democracy. Mass media is considered a principal tool for improving the atmosphere of democracy in society, though, since our media has no noticeable role in creating public opinion; it has not been able to be the fourth estate.

Questions about online journalism in the Kurdistan region

Response: Question 23: It has both advantages and disadvantages. It has facilitated access to information for the journalists and has enabled them to learn. While on the other hand, it has caused laziness of the journalists since instead of working in the field, many of them get their news from the websites and they add some additional information and then publish it. Nevertheless, overall, the journalists could not benefit perfectly from the internet.

Response: Question 25: If the proportion is the criteria of the development, we can say yes online journalism has developed, but if we consider the quality of the online news sites' texts and their professionalism, this is another issue. There are some websites that intentionally increase the number of readers of their stories or articles, while in fact maybe they have only a few readers. Nonetheless, there are online news sites that work professionally and have a large number of audiences.

Response: Question 27: I don't think so. This debate, is controversial everywhere. I believe the traditional media, either broadcast or printed, have their audiences who adore these traditional outlets. Many readers think that printed media has a special taste. Therefore, I don't believe that online journalism will displace traditional media, though; it becomes a principal part of our life.

Response: Question 28: Without a doubt, online journalism has caused a lack of professionalism and lack of sober journalism in the Kurdish media. For improving online journalism, I suggest that when an online site gets news from other sources, they should add their own words and information to the news. Unfortunately, most of the journalists who work in online journalism do not make any effort to enrich the news.

Response: Question 29: The problems that face online journalism are technical, which usually results in competition and conflict among the online news sites. For example, online sites harm each other through virus attacks; otherwise, I don't believe that there is any censorship on them.

Response: Question 30: There is no special law to deal with online journalism and it is dealt with in the context of other regulations, which is one of the problems. There should be a special law for regulating online journalism, which should be drafted after consultation with experts in this field.

Response: Question 32: No, I don't believe that there is any sort of censorship on online journalism in the Kurdistan region.

Response: Question 33: If there was censorship, no doubt that it is greater in traditional media than in online journalism.

Response: Question 37: The online news sites that have a high proportion of the audience, are playing a positive role in building a link between the Kurds in Kurdistan and in the diaspora; however, again a lack of professionalism in news or articles that post on online sites may sometimes lead to chaos, incredibility and discontinuity between Kurds, both in and outside Kurdistan. For example, sometimes several online news sites spread different information and stories about the same event.

Questions about the role of online journalism with freedom of expression and democracy in the Kurdistan region

Response: Question 38: Who sees online sites are only a specific elite. Though it is good to see the polls on the online news sites, in which a high proportion of the audience participate by choosing an option. This means that the audience's opinions have been considered and determine some issues.

Response: Question 39: Yes, it has had influences, but relatively. Since online journalism is out of control and censorship and people can express their views on it freely, it has had noticeable impact.

Response: Question 41: For improving, it is necessary for the online news sites to support their journalists, which makes their journalists make their best efforts in their work and this by turn affects the online news sites positively.

Response: Question 42: Many online news sites have provided space for the people to express their opinions through posting their articles, polls and commenting, which are considered as the best features of online journalism.

Response: Question 43: I don't think so, because there is chaos in online journalism. This chaos has misled the audience. For example, if an online news site posted even true news on a particular political party, the party may respond by a denial from other online sites. This has made people and authority choose not to consider the online news sites.

Response: Question 44: I believe there is a big problem in our understanding of the freedom of speech. We think when we express everything in our mind to the public this is freedom of speech. In general, social networking websites have provided a wide space, especially for the youths to express their views. Facebook is widespread among the youths in the Kurdistan region, though political conflict is reflected in this social networking website also. The most important thing on Facebook is that it helps in creating a kind of link and relationship among the users, though it depends on the users themselves to differentiate between true news and information from false news in these websites.

Response: Question 45: Because of the existence of a sort of conflict in these social websites, this has made them lose their credibility. Besides, the Kurdish society, like some other societies in general, has a problem with the evolution of new technologies, therefore not believing in what is posted on these social websites, makes it difficult to affect decision-making.

Response: Question 46: I believe that the online news sites are more influential than social networking websites, because we mainly look to what is posted on these social websites as entertainment and personal topics, while the professional websites have their own consideration where journalists are working and have commitments to many standards and principles.

Appendix 6.5: transcript of interview with Hevall Ebubekir Lecturer at the University of Sulaymaniyah and supervisor of the academic magazine for humanitarian science 4-8-2013

General questions about the media in the Kurdistan region:

Response: Question 4: The Shadow media are not credible, because they pretend something, and they do not know what that is. The partisan media has credibility in official news and reports, for example, when there is news about increasing the governmental employees' salaries, if this news was not published in the partisan media outlets, then it would not be reliable. Overall, the ruling parties' media outlets are credible in publishing stories that are related to government and political decisions, whereas in questioning and reporting about projects, problems and parliament's projects, the opposition media are more credible. On the other hand, the independent media has benefited from both ruling parties' and opposition parties' media since it has no method for coverage and information collection. Independent media should have its own words and make an effort to get news instead of relying on other media outlets.

In terms of popularity, according to some surveys that are conducted by some local and American organizations, the independent (private sector) and opposition media have more audiences, while the audiences of the ruling parties' media are continuously decreasing because they mainly publish and concentrate on some partisan senior officials' news. For example, when they publish a report about a meeting, they publish information about who participated in the meeting instead of reporting what decisions were taken.

Response: Question 5: Yes, it exists. When we say a media outlet is a private sector media or it is independent, we mean it is independent and relies on itself financially. Besides, sometimes some media outlets are non-independent financially, though they can have a sober and balanced policy.

The independent media in Kurdistan started with printed, and then other types of media medium have emerged, such as radio, TV and professional online news sites. In this regard, we probably can mention Radio *Newa* and NRT TV as outlets from the private sector media. In terms of online, we have a numerous number of online newspapers. The problem is that in general the use of online is improper in our country; most of them have not identified and resort to anonymity in publishing topics

and reports and usually have not evidences, thus they are weak and not performing well.

In terms of the problems of the independent media, I can say that the financial challenge comes first. Second, competition from the Shadow and ruling parties' media that are funded from the public budget, is considered another challenge. Other obstacles of the independent media are: lack of professionalism, lack of knowledge of the legal principles of journalism, lack of coverage potential, since many of these channels concentrate only on particular geographic areas, the absence of a proper distribution system, lack of any support, the depression of the market, lack of journalism skills and ability for coverage of events, and finally many of these independent media outlets show political attitudes in their reports and news.

Response: Question 6: I think during the day, radio stations are the most effective, while in the evening the TV is the most effective. Thus, we see that even the worse TV channel has hundreds of thousands of an audience, whereas we cannot find a printed newspaper or magazine with a 5000 circulation. Overall, not only in Kurdistan, but worldwide the TV is the most influential, because it is a multimedia medium and everyone regardless of the age and education level, can watch it. Besides, the audiences have many options to watch; they can watch sports, economics, movies and many more. Moreover, in our country, it is free to have and watch TV and it is like a member of the family.

Response: Question 7: The relationship between the officials and journalists is on some levels. One level is based on interests. Another level is based on friendship, while the third level depends on a professional basis, since the main duty of the journalists is looking for news and the officials constitute a source for news. In the Kurdistan region, there are mostly personal relationships, instead of the public relationship which dominates the relationship between them and there is no law to regulate this relationship.

Response: Question 8: Yes, the officials are the main source for news and even if their information were not true, though, since they are responsible for what they say, therefore their information is considered reliable. On the other hand, some of these officials usually use the media outlets for publishing and broadcasting their own messages, thus they often mislead the media and only provide the information that serves their own favour. Some of the other officials provide media outlets with information due to their government or political positions and want people to know what is going on in their society, whilst some others do that to publicize their activities. Nevertheless, getting information differs from one event to another, from a ministry to another, from a political party to another and so on. For example, we see a lot of information about the PUK in the media channels, while there is only a little about the KDP.

The relationship between the journalists and officials should change to a complementary relationship. For example, police officers who represent the executive

power and the judges who represent the judiciary system are playing the same role with the journalists to protect the public system; therefore, we should work on reconciliation with them because they look to each other aggressively.

Response: Question 9: When the officials want to publicize their messages and activities, they invite journalists even for trips abroad, whereas for the information that people and media channels want to get, these officials rarely cooperate. On the other hand, the officials and the authorities believe that the journalists are selective in their work, where they highlight only these quotations that stir people. Moreover, officials claim that when they give information to the journalists, they do not publish them honestly.

Response: Question 12: It is argued that journalists from the ruling parties' media have access to all information, though in my opinion it is vice versa. I believe that they have access to all of the government departments and organs while they are not allowed to get information. In contrast, journalists from the independent (private sector) and opposition media have less access to government departments, but they have more opportunities for accessing information.

It is important for the journalists, how to deal with having access to information. Besides, how and for what they use the information and how they will publish it. Overall, I believe journalists from the private sector and opposition media are accessible to the information that is of interest to the people, much more than the ruling parties' journalists are. The ruling parties' journalists are likely more accessible to official information that everyone can get, and they may get some important information, but the problem is that the policy of their channels may not allow the publishing of such information.

In my opinion, the proportion of violation against journalists differs in these types of media. For example, according to seven reports that have been published by the KJS and international organizations in recent years, the most violations were against those journalists who work for the opposition and then the private sector media. It is valuable to note that there is another type of violation against journalists from the ruling parties' media that is not being reported until now, which is psychological torture. For example, when a journalist reports about an important event and has the necessary evidence, but because of his/ her media outlet's strict policy, it would not be published or will be published improperly, this makes him/her suffer psychologically and eventually will not remain active. In general, this type of violation is widespread in the ruling parties' media, but violations such as murdering, kidnapping detaining, threatening journalists and breaking their possessions face journalists from the private sector and opposition media.

Response: Question 15: In the general framework, there is no pressure on the journalists. While during practicing their journalistic work, pressures appear. The trust is absent between the media outlets on one hand and the political power and the official departments, on the other hand. Therefore, pressures emerge and the political

power thinks that the media will ruin their work. The problem is that everyone even in a small public service department thinks that by concealing information, the political system will be safe, while in fact only transparency promotes the political system. These pressures have affected the performance of the journalists and have made them resort to self-journalism, where journalists rely on speculation in their reports instead of documents and evidence.

To overcome these problems, we should promote transparency and provide society with the necessary information that relates to them. The KRG should perform its duties in this regard and be transparent because hiding information always reduces trust.

Response: Question 16: These regulations are to some extent good, but the Presswork law, for example, has defects, where it has not developed solutions for many aspects of journalistic work and as a result, in many cases, the courts resort to other laws to fill the gap that exists in the Presswork law. For example, when a journalist criticizes someone and faces a lawsuit for that, the judge may resort to the Iraqi penal law if he/she did not find a clause that deals with public moral in the Presswork law. The Presswork law of the Kurdistan region does not contain any clause for detaining journalists or closing media outlets, while the Iraqi penal law contains all of these procedures. Besides, the second article of the Presswork law has guaranteed access to information for journalists, though when they go to a government department nobody provides them with information and there is no clause in the law for punishing the person who refuses to cooperate, because there are gaps in the Presswork law. Additionally, most of the journalists are not professional and not familiar with the basics of press law and journalistic ethics.

We can say that sometimes those laws that relate to journalistic work have drawbacks on the freedom of speech because the rule of law is very weak. Freedom should be protected by law, so when the rule of law and court is weak, there will be violations against freedom.

Response: Question 20: The fairness of the courts in Kurdistan differs from one place to another. According to my knowledge, in the courts of Sulaymaniyah city, some lawsuits of the officials' against journalists have been resolved in favour of the journalists, because either these officials have not attended the court hearings, or they did not have enough evidence. In fact, there are interventions in the courts since many lawsuits are political, though the courts in Sulaymaniyah have improved to a good extent and they resort to the experts of journalism for lawsuits relating to the journalists. The problem is that the judicial system in Kurdistan is not completely independent to make their own decisions in every lawsuit. For example, the Kurdistan president appoints the judges and the high commission of the justices, and people become judges due to their political backgrounds.

Response: Question 22: I believe it has not been able to become the fourth estate since the other three estates in Kurdistan are fragile and wherever these estates have not been made up properly, it is difficult for the fourth estate to make up also.

Nonetheless, the media in Kurdistan has been able to develop democracy, to change cultural and social values and to alter people's understanding of democracy and of their rights. The media has made people debate and criticize instead of resorting to violence. Meanwhile, the media has also played a negative role. For example, in many cases it has created spaces for confrontation, civil war and distrust. We can say that the whole system of the media in Kurdistan has helped in developing democracy.

Questions about online journalism in the Kurdistan region

Response: Question 23: Certainly, the internet has affected journalism in Kurdistan and it has many advantages for the journalists. First, it has facilitated and accelerated access to information and sending it to the media channels by the journalists. Second, it has reduced censorship on sending and exchanging any type of information. Third, the internet has made journalists' access to information much more dynamic, where journalists can conduct interviews with anyone wherever they are, through email, Skype and other software. Besides, it has accelerated publishing and broadcasting and has provided a new forum for the other types of the media channels so they can exceed borders. For example, most of the Kurdish satellite TVs cannot be watched in Australia, but through the internet, the Kurdish in the diaspora in this country are capable of watching all Kurdish TV. In general, the internet has facilitated the production, covering, publishing and delivering of the media message.

Response: Question 25: Online journalism has not developed so much, because the websites are mostly online versions of the printed media without any updating or proper archive. Besides, many of the websites only post the articles, while a professional online news site should write and post articles, news reports, investigative reports and other journalistic features. Many Kurdish websites only concentrate on opinion articles and do not care about daily events' news and even if they do so, their news is not subjected to checking or probably has been copied from other online news sites. Almost the same procedures used for preparing journalistic materials in the traditional media should be done for online journalism. For instance, journalists should cover the events in the field and then post it on their online newspapers. Nonetheless, recently, some of the new online news sites cover the events professionally and they, hopefully, will provide audiences with new information.

Response: Question 27: The development of online journalism has not led to the end of the printed media, though it has reduced and limited its audience. In contrast, it has become an important source for printed media. If we look at a printed newspaper, we see that almost 80% of its articles and subjects have come from online news sites. Online journalism has become a quick source of information and has helped printed media to be more widespread. To illustrate, the printed newspapers reach tens of thousands of readers through their online versions, while their printed versions may not exceed circulation of a few thousand. Moreover, it has helped in maintaining printed media and re-accessing it easily. Therefore, we can say that online journalism has not led to the end of printed media, though the problem is that because the

culture of reading has become very poor in Kurdistan, we may override the phase of printed media faster than other societies.

Response: Question 28: Online news sites should deal with all types of journalistic techniques, but unfortunately, the Kurdish online news sites usually deal with two types: concise news and opinion articles. It is very important for these online sites to deal with investigative reports and news stories. Besides, the updating process of these online news sites is too late and sometimes several days pass and they do not upload new reports or do not update the texts of the news, which may have seen new developments. For improving Kurdish online journalism, it is necessary for them to act as the printed media in dealing with various journalistic techniques just as the BBC, Aljazeera, VOA or Elaph.com are doing. When the audience browses these online news sites, they get more than one thing and in different fields.

Response: Question 29: The main problem that faces Kurdish online journalism is technical because Internet services in Kurdistan in general are too poor. Therefore, uploading and downloading is difficult, especially since online news sites rely to a high extent on footage and photos that have large sizes and need a speedy Internet service. Another problem is that the audience cannot find the addresses of most of the online news sites easily because there is no guide for this purpose. Moreover, the Kurdish online news sites change their logo from time to time, which may confuse the audience. Anonymity is another problem of the online sites, as many of those who write for these sites are unknown and speak on all topics. The worse thing is that such anonymous people become sources for other online sites; as a result, these online news sites lose their credibility. Additionally, people do not have the opportunity to express themselves in the traditional media outlets, therefore, when they write to online sites, they write harshly and resort to anonymity because they think they may be jeopardized. This situation has created much social harassment and collisions. Unfortunately, we are not using this technology as required or properly.

Response: Question 30: Online journalism is dealt with by other laws. In fact, there are efforts to enact a law for regulating online journalism, though this problem is universal, for example the Internet service provider is in the USA or the UK and the website is operated in Kurdistan, so in such situations it is difficult to deal with the websites legally. For those online newspapers that are known, or there are known writers, it is easy to open a lawsuit against them in case they violate public morals, though what should be done if the writer is abroad or unknown, or the website is operating outside Kurdistan? It is problematic and needs to be resolved.

Response: Question 32: There is no censorship in the Kurdistan region and people can access any website they like. There may have been some attempts to suspend some Internet lines or hacking some particular websites, but this does not come from the official bodies. For example, during the demonstration on 17th Feb. 2011, the Internet lines and mobile phone services were stopped for a short time, but this has not become a phenomenon.

Response: Question 33: Censorship in the traditional media is more than in online media. For example, anyone can anonymously establish a website and publish articles, while as we noticed in the last four years, all the media lawsuits in Sulaymaniyah's courts except for one, were against printed media. In fact, in Kurdistan the TV is also rarely subjected to lawsuits, whereas it is viewed by almost 6 million people, but because the printed media remains, even though it has only a couple of thousand circulation, it leaves a significant impact, therefore, they are more subject to censorship than TV, radio and online sites.

Response: Question 37: It has a significant influence because through online journalism you can find your originality. Online journalism has opened the world to people and has facilitated understanding. In addition, it has globalized people and has enabled them to search for information and to reach various sources. Moreover, it has increased and accelerated the opportunity of exchanging and many others. Besides, it helps people to campaign such as protesting against the genocide processes against the Kurds, the political situation and many other issues.

Questions about the role of online journalism with freedom of expression and democracy in the Kurdistan region

Response: Question 38: If what is published on the online sites is not re-published in the printed media or re-broadcast on the TVs, it cannot make that impact because online news sites have an elite group of readers who have their own views and hardly ever are their opinions affected by these online sites. I think what is published in online media should be re-published in the traditional media outlets.

Response: Question 39: Certainly, online journalism has participated significantly in widening and promoting freedom of speech because the participation of the people increases the opportunity of freedom and this is progressing. Nonetheless, the influences of online journalism will appear clearly on the coming generations, but now the word is mainly for TVs.

Response: Question 41: All of the ethical and legal principles are important for online journalism because the future is for online. For example, we are browsing the printed media online and read books through new communication technologies. A great responsibility rests with online journalism. Therefore, it should work on democratic principles and by presenting different opinions. Besides, it is necessary for online journalism to be open and provide the opportunity to all people to say their words so they can feel their citizenship.

Response: Question 42: It depends on the proportion of the people who use the internet. In general, online journalism has provided the required opportunities for those who use the internet, though it is also necessary that there will be some procedures. For example, it is necessary to control how many times a person can vote for a poll in an internet account. We need to raise social awareness among people and this is one of online journalism's duties, but it still could not play a role in this, whereas

the traditional media channels have had a noticeable role. Online news sites should guide and teach people how to deal with the procedures of the polls and commenting.

Response: Question 43: Yes, nowadays in the Kurdistan region online news sites, especially the professionals, which have a clear policy and known addresses and names, have a high proportion of audiences. To illustrate, sometimes the Kurdistan Region Presidency publishes statements in response to some critical articles that have been posted by these online news sites. People now can easily access these online sites and express themselves and their attitudes towards political decisions.

Response: Question 44: They have an important role because these social networking websites have been found to help everyone to say their words, though I think we have not benefited from these websites as required in a developing democracy. These websites are for social reasons not political. For example, you can find your friends or make new relationships with people who are close to you in thinking and desires, whereas in our country they mainly use them for political purposes. I believe we do not have enough knowledge of using these websites properly and there are many fake accounts, which have weakened the credibility of these websites. These have created many problems for the role of these websites.

Response: Question 45: Certainly, they have an impact, but among those youths who use these websites. Sometimes attitudes have emerged from these social networking websites, which are then followed by important political attitudes. Therefore, we can say that these websites have an influence on creating public opinion, but this depends on the sincerity of the users of these websites. These websites have an important role in creating and developing public opinion and even on political decision-making, since our politicians have a good presence on these websites and have accounts.

Response: Question 46: The social networking websites are important, except what is published on these sites is not reliable and difficult to be believed, it is only believed if they are published on the online news sites or traditional media outlets. In general, the professional online news sites have filters and standards for what they publish, though in the social networking websites there is no filter.

**Appendix 6.6: transcript of interview with Hiwa Osman Blogger, media developer and consultant, director of *Mediwawan* foundation for media training
25-7-2013**

General questions about the media in the Kurdistan region

Response: Question 4: Credibility of Shadow media is in danger because they pretend to be something that they are not. For example, the parties' affiliated media show their identity, and when I get news from them, I know how much is true and real, while Shadow media do not show their real identity. The media in the middle such as *Awêne*, *Hawlatî* and others, I know what they mean, but they are limited by skills, funding and by breaking access from the information sources. The main problem of the Shadow

media in terms of credibility is they pretend to be something they are not and when they publish a story, even if it is true, the people will not believe what they say 100%.

Response: Question 5: It exists. I would say the word private media instead of independence, because private is more accurate and nobody is independent in general, since everyone is affected by the environment and the background that it came from. Looking to Kurdistan, especially, the two main cities Erbil and Sulaymaniyah, you see that the story is in Erbil and the journalism is in Sulaymaniyah, and this is the problem. The level of corruption, the level of mismanagement, the level of abuse of power, the level of other crime, it is equal if not more in Erbil than in Sulaymaniyah, but when you look at the extent of freedom of speech, it is much more in Sulaymaniyah than in Erbil. The problem today is because more media exists in Sulaymaniyah and very few are in Erbil, the culture of being a journalist is a lot more popular in Sulaymaniyah than in Erbil amongst the youngsters. I have seen people in Sulaymaniyah who wanted to be journalists as their first choice of life, while it is always the second or third choice of people here in Erbil. Who wants to enter the media department, they always wanted to be something else, as a result for the private sector media, it is too difficult to operate in Erbil with the Sulaymaniyah style, but that does not mean they should not exist here in Erbil. Journalism without a story is not journalism and story without media is not a story, so the two need to marry somehow. I can say that a step like *Rudaw* (event) channel is in the right direction for bringing more journalism to Erbil.

There is a group of private sector media where they are seen as independent or those in the middle or not a part of the political parties. For example, there is NRT TV, where there are a lot of accusations regarding them that they receive money from here and there, but the owner of this TV says that they do not receive money and he funds the TV, while other channels cannot openly deny their receiving of money from here and there. For some channels like *Rudaw*, *Xendan*, *Çawdêr* (observer), it is very difficult for the owners to come and justify how they operate. The private sector media has broadcast, printed and their online versions.

In terms of the main problem of private sector media, I believe there are some key problems such as very limited funding, they are mostly set up for a political reason and not to do business, where usually there is a political goal behind this private media and their owners want to have an influence in society. The other problem is lack of basic skills of the editors and reporters and lack of professionalism because of lack of funding. Moreover, another prominent problem is that these private sector media are seen as opponents by the news sources themselves.

Response: Question 6: Printed media is the least, since their circulation is too limited, so it does not reach a large audience. Online journalism is growing and becoming more popular, but still the most effective in Kurdistan is TV and then radio.

Response: Question 7: The relationship between the two is unhealthy.

Response: Question 8: On one hand, the politicians have their own media, so they do not care about the other media; on the other hand, they are not under legal obligation to give an interview to *Hawllatî* or to *Awêne* newspapers or to others. Besides, they have the *Sêber* (Shadow) media, which is also connected to them and they provide them with some information. So as a result, the relationship between the private sector media and the politicians is very unhealthy, because of lack of access to information, the journalists either resort to relying on unknown sources or they go to analysing and predicting things from their own thoughts, eventually this does not serve society.

Apart from the very recent legislation of right of access to information, no other thing in Kurdistan regulates that relationship between the media and the politicians and the new sources. The problems are, as a result, a lack of understanding of the role of the media in society.

Response: Question 9: The most prominent criticisms of the journalists are lack of access, lack of information because they do not give out the information, harassment and harassment after publishing. In contrast, the officials accuse the journalists of lack of skills, professionalism and credibility. The problem is because very few of our media body workers here in Kurdistan convey the truth or the core of what information they get is as it is, so the politicians do not trust them. In general, unethical journalism is the main complaint of the officials. Besides, they claim that the journalists implement others' agendas in their work, which I do not believe so.

Response: Question 12: The journalists from the ruling parties' media are more accessible and whenever they want, they can even interview the president of the Kurdistan region. In fact, since the establishment of the private sector media in 2000, the same group of politicians rules the country, though none of the private sector media was able to interview the presidents of Iraq or Kurdistan, except for *Hawllatî* newspaper, which interviewed the president of Iraq.

Response: Question 15: The main problem is that Kurdish journalism is too political. It should take care of other aspects as well. I think the real journalism is not only making a story through a phone call with a senior politician, it is investigating about the origins of the events. Unfortunately, what is published in the Kurdish media outlets is mostly like public conversations in the teahouses.

Response: Question 16: I think they have made journalists confused to some extent, except for the recent law of access to information, which enters into effect 90 days after it is passed. This law is good; though I do not know to what extent it will be implemented. For the other laws, their positive side is not implemented and is only ink on paper and has been written regardless of the future. To illustrate, the Presswork law has only been written for printed media, while we have TVs and other media outlets. Drafting such law is not legislator's work, but it is media regulators' work. For regulating the media, there should be a media commission as well.

Response: Question 20: No, they are not fair because the judges do not realize what journalism is. The main problem of our courts is that they deal with the law under the influence of the Ba'athist party's legacy. The new Iraq, including the Kurdistan region, has not renewed the laws and not been regulated properly. Iraq runs based on the old laws and this is the country where, in its history, only four times has the word transparency been mentioned in its laws, while 230 times the word of secrecy has been mentioned.

Response: Question 22: Yes, the media has a role in improving democracy and it, especially the private sector media, debates about this subject, though it has not been able to be the fourth estate, this is about to appear covertly in Facebook.

Questions about online journalism in the Kurdistan region

Response: Question 23: Some of the benefits of the Internet are that it provides everyone the opportunity for free publishing. Everyone can have his or her own blogs and post whatever they want, though in terms of technology I believe journalists still need to learn about how to use the Internet. It even has benefits for the environment in Kurdistan since it has made paper consumption much less.

Response: Question 25: Yes Kurdish online journalism has developed. For example, according to *Alexa.com* website, the most viewed website in Iraq is *Xendan.org*, which is a Kurdish online news site, though in Kurdistan, people still rely on TV.

Response: Question 27: Certainly, online journalism has significantly affected the traditional media and it controls the media market to some extent. If the printed newspapers have no free financing, they have to close.

Response: Question 28: Yes, to some extent. Since nowadays, everyone is capable of writing on online sites, so this has changed the identity of sober journalism.

Response: Question 29: There are only a few obstacles and they are not safety or security problems, but they are mostly professional obstacles.

Response: Question 30: No, there is no law to deal with online journalism. The power elite in Kurdistan has no idea what online journalism is, they only know TV, printed media and Facebook because they know that Hosni Mubarak was removed from power through Facebook and the Arab spring was also coming across Facebook.

Response: Question 32: No, there is no censor on online journalism.

Response: Question 33: Certainly, censorship is much more on traditional media than online where there is no censor.

Response: Question 37: I believe online journalism has had a role in expanding the space of debating for more people while traditional media is limited in terms of time and space. For example, on the TV, news is read two or three times per day, but in online news sites it is permanent. The same thing is true for the printed newspaper despite it being limited in terms of space and it reaches the audiences, whereas the online sites may have hundreds of thousands of audiences and have no space problem, thus they have created a broader space of debate among the people.

Questions about the role of online journalism with the freedom of expression and democracy in the Kurdistan region

Response: Question 38: Compared to the traditional media, in general all online media types have helped in creating more rational and clear public opinion. The online news sites such as NRT, *Awêne* and *Hawlatî* have recently connected their space of commenting to the Facebook, where people can comment on their topics. Nowadays, through online media, people have much more sources; they are capable of commenting and writing about any common issues, which may be read by a large number of people. Besides, through online media, all people have access to know what is going on and they know where to look for any subject. Today online media has democratized the information in the Kurdistan region.

Response: Question 39: Online journalism has significant influences on expanding and promoting free expression in two ways: commenting and writing.

Response: Question 41: The websites that operate as real online news sites are few. Online news sites like *Xendan* and *Rudaw* are to some extent real online journalism, while most of the other websites are only an extension of the traditional media channels. Whenever the websites declared that they are an independent mass media body and independent from printed and broadcasted media, they can play more roles in fostering democracy. They should be separate from other mass media types, but in continuous cooperation in terms of exchanging news and information. Besides, their reports and articles should be different from what are published in the printed and broadcast media. For example, their photos should have high quality and their texts should be concise because no one wants to read long articles and reports.

Response: Question 42: Because of the fears of the improper use of commenting space by audiences such as insults and defamations, most of the online news sites and official websites have restricted their space for commenting. As a result, the debates have transferred to Facebook and not remained on the online news sites.

Response: Question 43: No, it has no noticeable impact on decision-making and even if it does, its influences are similar to the traditional media's influences. Nevertheless, since the use and access to online sites is easier than some traditional media outlets, therefore even the officials turned to online news sites instead of printed media, as an example.

Response: Question 44: They have a noticeable impact and there is a large space for freedom of speech on the social networking websites. The online news sites are more conservative and like the traditional media they have some fear of allowing commenting for everyone. Besides, the officials and some Islamic extremists may not be tolerant with those who criticize them and may resort to violence. As a result, the debates have moved to the social websites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. For instance, you may have a funny footage and no online news site is daring to post it, so you resort to publishing it on YouTube, Facebook or other social websites.

Response: Question 45: The social networking websites are the most effective in creating the public sphere and public opinion because they are completely free and there is no censor on them.

Response: Question 46: In promoting freedom of speech, online journalism and social networking websites complement each other. For example, online journalism may begin with publishing a subject, but the debate about it will emerge and start in the social networking websites.

Appendix 6.7: transcript of interview with Kemal Reuf Director of *Shar* (city) Company, which publishes *Shar* magazine and operates *Sharpres* online news site (Sharpres.net)

15-8-2013

General questions about the media in the Kurdistan region

Response: Question 4: In my opinion, the so-called shadow media outlets have no credibility since they have been founded for creating chaos in the media. If I want to know the KDP's message, I will turn my TV to the KDP's formal and sober channels instead of the shadow media outlets. In the meantime, if I want to know about the opposition's attitudes, I will watch the opposition parties' TVs. This means that each of them has its own consideration. Nonetheless, the media channels that have the most consideration in society are those that were able to maintain their independence and have worked to be non-biased. The people care about the financial independence of the media channels and they realize that if any channel was funded by the political parties, this will cause a lack of credibility for these channels. I think that the private media sector outlets have more audiences than other types of media. To illustrate, despite having many obstacles, they still have the highest sales.

Response: Question 5: The independent media exists in the Kurdistan region but it is in a chaotic situation. Besides, most of us have a wrong understanding of this type of media believing that it is a business service, which it is not and it has its own standards and principles. I believe that any independent (private sector) media outlet should be founded by two, three or four journalists in order to maintain its independence and to be away from any financial or political influences. In my opinion, when three or four journalists, close in thoughts, agree to establish a media outlet; this will help in the success of this outlet in the future.

The increasing number of media outlets such as television channels and online news sites in the recent years, resulted in the reduction of printed media audiences. This has led to creating chaos in the media market and declines in sales of printed media, which constitute the cornerstone of independent media incomes. Besides, the rate of limited advertisements has dropped as well.

Response: Question 6: The most influential media outlets in the Kurdistan region are, first, the TV channels where it exists in every house and everyone can watch it. Second, it is the online sites.

Response: Question 7: There is a misunderstanding among officials about their relationship with the journalists. They believe that if they have a friendship or a relationship with a journalist, this means that the journalist should turn a blind eye to their defects. Many officials have boycotted our phone calls only because we have criticized them in our reports. Therefore, I think the relationship is unhealthy.

Response: Question 8: In the rural areas and the slums, the ordinary citizens are our news sources. When there is an event in these areas, in general the witnesses, who are often ordinary citizens, provide us with information about it. Besides, the information and news that we get from the political party members is much more than we get from the KRG officials. The KRG has prevented by law their employees from talking to the independent (private sector) media and it has developed many routines for getting permission to conduct journalistic work in government organisations. While in general, in the political parties, there are fewer routines, however, it differs from one political party to another. For example, some political parties are more open than others, and their members believe that they have the right to speak whether in their real names or anonymously, whereas some other parties have severe restrictions and principles that prevent their members from speaking, otherwise they may face detention.

For regulating the relationship between journalists and officials, I suggest activating the Presswork and other related laws on the ground. It is true that we have notes on this law, but since it has been approved by parliament, we have to respect and implement it. Besides, I suggest that the officials abandon their aggressive attitude to the journalists.

Response: Question 9: One of the journalists' criticisms is lack of transparency in the ministries and other KRG organs, which have their online websites and media departments for publishing their news and information. Besides, they have official spokespersons, though they rarely answer journalists' phone calls and they only conduct short press conferences to say their words, where this is not enough for a journalistic report. Moreover, although we suffer from a lack of access to information, the journalists do not see any prospects that the KRG establish a department for providing the journalists with information. Another criticism of the journalists is the injustice of the financial support of the media outlets. For example, *Rudaw* foundation receives 90-100 Million Iraqi Dinars monthly, whereas there are other media outlets that were founded ten years ago and have not benefited from the government financially or even in terms of getting government ads. On the other hand, the officials accuse the media, especially the independent (private sector) media, of lack of accuracy. They also claim that we, as the private sector media, are biased to the opposition only because in some cases, such as corruption and some social subjects, we have the same perspective.

Response: Question 12: The journalists who work for the political parties' affiliated media are more accessible to information, but they have no right for publishing it.

For a long time the journalists from independent media were the most vulnerable to violation, though recently we have heard that journalists from the ruling parties and opposition media have been subjected to violation as well. For example, currently since the two ruling parties: the PUK and the KDP have different lists for participating in the elections, we see that there is a sort of conflict between their media and journalists. Nevertheless, the largest proportion of violation is against the journalists from the independent media.

Response: Question 15: Despite the political and economic problems, we have the problem of writing. Until now, we could not achieve a consensus about a unified writing language and this is a common problem of the different Kurdish media outlets. Another problem of the Kurdish press is the distribution of the printed media. We have no independent distribution company and even the address system in our country is improper and inaccurate. On the other hand, there are several issues that the Kurdish media should concentrate on, such as the environment, human rights and national issues.

There are several pressures on the media. At the beginning, the pressures were only classical such as threatening by sending messages, cutting salaries and others, though now the pressures are different. For example, power elite create their own media to compete with the independent media, which works to insult the independent journalists through spreading untrue propaganda.

To overcome the obstacles of the Kurdish media, I believe the KRG should support the private sector media so they can conduct their duties as watchdog so it can become the fourth estate. Besides, the current syndicate of journalists should be dissolved, because it is the remnants of the civil war and should be replaced by a new syndicate that represents all of the media channels and journalists.

Response: Question 16: The Presswork law has some good articles, though at the same time, it has other fuzzy articles and we have reservations about them. In terms of access to information, we are dissatisfied with the PUK and KDP.

I believe some of the laws relating to the media in the Kurdistan region have had drawbacks. Moreover, the promulgation of some recent laws has limited freedom of speech, especially the right of demonstration.

Response: Question 20: No, I do not think so. The problem is that most of the judges here cannot understand the duties of journalism and they judge against the journalists based on Stalinist mentality. There are defects in our courts and the political parties and the authorities have influence on the judges.

Response: Question 22: Certainly, it has a significant role in promoting the principles of democracy, though it could not become the fourth estate. I believe that the independent media has played a major role in educating people about their duties and rights, whereas we could not guide them so they can claim for their rights.

Questions about online journalism in the Kurdistan region

Response: Question 23: Online journalism in the Kurdistan region is more chaotic than traditional journalism. At least in the traditional media, someone is responsible for the channel and it has a clear identity with address and is committed to moral and legal standards, while in the websites there is no such commitment and mostly anonymity is prevalent. Most of these online sites are posting articles and news without checking their credibility, which this makes a mess.

The benefits of the internet are many, for example, the authorities cannot close down an online site. They were able to close many traditional media outlets, though now because of the internet they have given up the idea of closing any media channels. Furthermore, the internet is too fast in publishing. To illustrate, the best printed newspapers are issued once per day, while the online news sites can update their information every half-hour.

In my opinion, online journalism is beneficial for the people and society, while it has many drawbacks for journalists since it has no financial profits and it is unreliable because many online sites post fabricated information.

Response: Question 25: Online journalism in the Kurdistan region has seen some developments and the reason is that we cannot be isolated from the world. Nowadays a high proportion of the people in the Kurdistan region use the Internet. For example, in the last decade, there were only a few houses in Sulaymaniyah city that had Internet access, but now it has become a daily necessity, like a mobile phone.

Response: Question 27: Online journalism cannot replace traditional media, including printed media, completely, because each of them has its own taste, however, it has affected traditional media a lot.

Response: Question 28: Yes, it has a negative role. Many websites, which have been created abroad, have political reasons and have a very negative role on sober and real journalism. For example, they post sexy and other improper photos without taking into account that they may have a teenage audience.

The current Press law is only for the printed media; therefore, I think there should be a special law for online journalism, which contains penalties and rewards for the online news sites and websites.

Response: Question 29: Not applicable

Response: Question 30: There is no special law for online journalism and it is not committed to any law. I believe that a law should regulate it.

Response: Question 32: There is no censorship on the online sites. I have heard that about some specific websites being blocked, but this was only in a few cases.

Response: Question 33: All of the journalists who face lawsuits are working for the printed media channels not online, therefore, the censorship and pressures are on the printed media not online.

Response: Question 37: It is not as required. If it is organized it will be a big gain and if not it will be a big disaster.

Questions about the role of online journalism with freedom of expression and democracy in the Kurdistan region

Response: Question 38: It has an impact on public opinion. In terms of the printed media, we are isolated from the world to an extent. For example, we cannot send our printed newspapers or magazines to Iranian Kurdistan or other parts of Kurdistan and even then there is a sort of isolation between the *Soranî* areas and the *Badînanî* areas in the Kurdistan region, therefore, this online journalism has been helpful for us and has become a bridge between us.

Response: Question 39: Certainly online journalism has an impact in underpinning freedom of speech. I remember first, when we began to circulate *Hawllatî* newspaper, we were afraid the authority would close the newspapers down, though now there is no such fear and this is not because the political parties have become more democratic, but because they realize that even if they close down our printed media, there will still be online media. Therefore, it has had an impact on supporting freedom of speech.

Response: Question 41: I think they should have a code of ethics. The online news sites can create a group and each member should sign the code of ethics and those who do not commit to the code, should be punished.

Response: Question 42: Maybe it has been able to a small extent, because most of the comments are tendentious that make us remove them. The comments on the online news sites cannot make any debate and most are offensive.

Response: Question 43: Until now, it has not influenced decision-making since it could not gain any consideration such as the TV and printed media have, because of the chaotic situation of online media. The worse is that none of the media outlets in the Kurdistan region have been able to influence any decision-making.

Response: Question 44: It is not possible for a nation to be isolated from the social networking websites in such an era. I believe that the social networking websites have created a circle and have made the youths in our country read and write comments and texts on these websites, which has made a sort of opportunity for their contribution. In general, the Kurdish people were illiterate, though now fortunately these social networking websites have made some people learn to read and write.

Response: Question 45: No, I do not think so. There are some cases that the social networking websites have benefited, in particular the people during the Arab spring in Egypt and Tunisia, but in the Kurdistan region, although there were several demonstrations, the people could not benefit from these websites. The people use these websites, but they do not care about what is being published. Most of the youths use these websites as entertainment or for expressing themselves without any practices on the ground. To illustrate, if someone writes a text on a national issue, it may gain tens of comments and the like, but when it comes to gathering in reality for this purpose, it may be only a few of them are ready to gather. Therefore, I do not believe that the social websites have had an impact on public opinion.

We could not affect any decision through these websites, because we are poor in using new technology and do not know how to use it properly.

Response: Question 46: Online journalism is more effective because it is more considerable than the social networking websites and they are more organized and accurate in all respects. When I am talking about the online news sites, I mean the professionals.

Appendix 6.8: transcript of interview with Khaled Sulaiman Journalist, columnist and lead trainer of media

17-7-2013

General questions about the media in the Kurdistan region

Response: Question 4: This classification only exists in Kurdistan, which is an awful classification. Sometimes, some of the media outlets, which are affiliated to the political parties overtly, misuse objectivity for the favour of their parties. Meanwhile, the private sector (independent) media also has fallen into the same problem and on many occasions they do not care about any subject if it was not in their favour. There is a sort of monopoly because of the political scene.

I believe nowadays stirring media outlets have the biggest audiences in Kurdistan and this has a negative impact. For example, when a media channel publishes a news story about the political situation or corruption, it gets a high proportion of the audience even if it does not have credible sources.

Response: Question 5: Yes, independent media exists. I think the circulation of several newspapers, even if they were not 100% independent has been able to stir many subjects such as criticizing the political elite, ruling system and corruption. This opened a new door, which has made the political parties get used to being criticized and has had a positive influence.

Defining this type of media is difficult. Until now some of these media channels that claim independence, have a link with a political party, though in my opinion the independent or free journalism is that media which cares about people's right to know. The main problems of the private sector media are the financial difficulties and lack of access to information.

Response: Question 6: The TV is the most influential media channel because it can reach everywhere and it is for all of the societal classes.

Response: Question 7: Unfortunately, the relationship between the journalists and the officials in Kurdistan is based on personal interests.

Response: Question 8: Not so far. I suggest activating the law of access to information, which has been approved by parliament. Besides, the government officials who are public figures should deal with all equally.

Response: Question 9: The most prominent journalists' criticism is that the officials do not provide information except for their loyal channels, whereas the officials' criticisms of the journalists are lack of objectivity and resorting to libel and defamation and blunt language. I think that both sides are right.

Response: Question 12: Probably some people think that the political parties' affiliated journalists can access information more than the others, though, as a journalist, I have realized and I have seen that those journalists who work for the private sector media have a stronger relationship with the officials and have got information from senior officials. Sometimes, even the party officials prefer to publish some particular information in the private sector media so their affiliated media do not hold any responsibility.

There is violation against journalists of all media types. The problem is that when the journalists want to cover a news story, they become a part of the event, for example, they become a demonstrator, vandal and they think that they have power. On the other hand, the police officers and security forces give themselves fantasy power, alleging the protection of the country's sovereignty and prestige. Both the journalists and the police officers are citizens and each of them has a particular task. The police officers should protect the demonstrators not beat them and the journalists should record and transfer the opinions of the demonstrators and the police officers in the meantime, but the problem is that there is an unhealthy relationship, which has led to violations against all. A good example of this is what happened in the demonstrations of 17th Feb. 2011, where the journalists affiliated to the ruling parties were unable to cover the events among the demonstrators and on the other hand, journalists from the opposition parties or private sector media were beaten by the police officers.

Response: Question 15: I think nowadays in the Kurdistan region everyone can say anything. For example, some newspapers are calling the president of the Kurdistan region a dictator and calling the political parties corrupt. There may be some pressures to prevent publishing some specific information and this has affected the performance of the journalists. I think the problem is that there is chaotic freedom of expression.

Response: Question 16: I do not think so. The problem is that neither the Presswork law, nor the law of access to information could regulate the media work in the region. In the law of access to information, after every sentence there is a 'but' word. Besides, in many courts in Kurdistan the judges resort to the Iraqi old penal law to punish the journalists, instead of the law of Presswork. Moreover, the media channels in Kurdistan do not agree on a code of journalistic ethics.

Response: Question 20: No, they are not fair. For example, there are 15 lawsuits against me and it is been three years that I have been attending court, all that because I published a government document about corruption. I think the courts are not fair, but I cannot generalize this. The problem is that the judicial system in Kurdistan is controlled by the government, whereas it should be independent administratively and financially and to be away from interventions.

Response: Question 22: Until now, the Kurdish media could not become the fourth estate, because when the media stirs a subject, it does not follow up the subject as required. Besides, the political monopoly in Kurdistan has affected the media as well. We cannot say that the media has no role in democracy, though it is not as required. To illustrate, we have not seen a minister or a senior official resign because of a journalistic article or report.

Questions about online journalism in the Kurdistan region

Response: Question 23: The internet is useful for the journalists so they can create websites to publish information. Besides, it has facilitated access to information. For example, if you need information about a global subject, you can get it quickly through the internet.

Response: Question 25: Online journalism in Kurdistan is at the phase of development. Recently, a kind of interaction has begun between the audiences and the online journalistic websites, which means the contribution of the audiences. Furthermore, the Kurdish media is stepping towards multimedia and the online newspapers are posting reports in footage, voice, text and photos. Overall, Kurdish online journalism has developed.

Response: Question 27: Yes, it has had an effect and caused a decline of the traditional media outlets' audiences, which is a global phenomenon. It is true that the internet has affected printed media and has more of an audience, though I do not think that it has displaced it.

Response: Question 28: Yes, certainly. Nowadays, most of the news reports that are published on online news sites are not objective, they do not have enough information and have no reliable sources. Therefore, they are not professional. I suggest that the news and reports of the online news sites have reliable sources, photos, voice records and to be objective just like the traditional media.

Response: Question 29: No, it has no problem because nowadays there are some fake websites that do not have clear addresses or owners. Besides, most of the online journalistic sites in Kurdistan have not registered with a government body or in a company, therefore even if they publish illegal topics, it is difficult to sue them.

Response: Question 30: There is no special law for online journalism and it is dealt with through other regulations. I think it should have a special law.

Response: Question 32: It is difficult to impose censorship on the websites since most of them have no known address, owners, supervisors and journalists. Besides, in Kurdistan we do not have a national network, which enables the authorities to block any website they want. In Iraq, there is a sort of national network (.IQ), but it is only used in some places in this country. In general, the servers of the websites are either in Europe or in the USA.

Nevertheless, there are some well-known online news sites that I think have some sort of censor. For example, I know a journalist who has been sued because of a news story

he published on an online news site. I believe, in the credible and considerable online news sites there is censorship.

Response: Question 33: The censorship is greater on the TV and printed media than in online journalism.

Response: Question 37: Yes, it has an impact. For example, through online journalism, the Kurds in the diaspora are able to preserve their language and culture and always be in touch with what is going on in their country in terms of economy, literature, politics, culture and other aspects. Besides, the internet has facilitated and accelerated the exchange of mail, books and many things.

Questions about the role of online journalism with the freedom of expression and democracy in the Kurdistan region

Response: Question 38: It has had an impact, especially in the big cities. Among the youths, two new technology tools are very popular and effective: the internet and the mobile phone. This has made communication in the big cities more influential and powerful. Besides, in the big cities online journalism has had an influence on public opinion. To illustrate, many times when there will be a demonstration, a rally or a seminar, the organizers publish announcements or send invitations to people to attend and participate in these events. Many times, I have received such invitations.

Response: Question 39: Yes, because in online journalism, there are many criticisms of the political elite and system, companies, the figures of the political scene and many other fields.

Response: Question 41: In my opinion, the first step for developing online journalism is that it should have a code of ethics and a visible body. If it was able to do so, then we can talk about developing other aspects of online journalism. In general, if the online news sites were known, registered and committed to journalistic ethics, hence we can talk about other aspects such as the standards of writing news stories, articles and other techniques.

Response: Question 42: This interaction frequently exists in online journalism. There are two points in these websites, first people can participate in the polls and second they can write comments on news stories or articles for criticizing and evaluating information. Moreover, ordinary citizens can send their articles, photos or footages to these online sites easily, and so are published.

Response: Question 43: No, I do not think so. In general, no media types in Kurdistan have been able to affect the decision-making process. Nowadays, many times and in many places, what is published in the online news sites becomes a subject of debate. To illustrate, yesterday after I wrote an opinion on Facebook about re-nominating the president of the Kurdistan region for another term and the mechanisms of the amendments of the constitution, it got more than 30 comments and started a debate. This means that social networking websites have influence.

Response: Question 44: In the social networking websites, especially Facebook, which is the most popular in Kurdistan, everything is allowed for publishing such as footage,

photos, free opinions, defamation and others, therefore they have an impact on promoting freedom of expression.

Response: Question 45: One of the benefits of the online sites is that they have created many links in the social networking websites. This shows how powerful these social websites are. I think these social websites have significant influence that has made the printed and online news sites resort to them.

In terms of public opinion, I believe that the social networking websites have an impact among the youths rather than other classes of society. Besides, I think that they have not affected political decision-making.

Response: Question 46: I believe that the social networking websites are more influential because they are not subject to any censorship.

Appendix 6.9: transcript of interview with Nyaz 'Ebdulla Reporter and program presenter at Radio Nawa

28-8-2013

General questions about the media in the Kurdistan region

Response: Question 4: We must not forget that the political parties' affiliated and the Sêber 'shadow' media both are guided media by the political parties and do not deserve praise, because post 1991 they caused the outbreak and continuation of the civil war in Kurdistan, therefore I think they only serve a particular political agenda instead of society.

In terms of the audience, no doubt there is plenty of partisan media foundation in the Kurdistan region, therefore in some phases they have had the highest number of audiences. Nevertheless, nowadays, since each of the political parties has several media channels, their audiences have also distributed and dispersed on these channels. Besides, most of these audiences follow these partisan media outlets only to know the opposing views. When it comes to the shadow media outlets, although I have no accurate data about their audiences, some of the new shadow media outlets such as *Rudaw* have a high proportion of audiences compared to other media channels of the same political party that finances *Rudaw*.

Response: Question 5: Yes, I believe that the independent media exists in Kurdistan. No doubt, funding is essential for this purpose and we can say that several media outlets in Kurdistan depend on their financial outcome for maintaining them. This has made these outlets be committed to the genuine standards and principles of journalistic work and if whenever they violate these principles, they apologize for that. Nowadays, in the Kurdistan region, there are TVs, radios, printed and online media that is operated by the private sector.

The independent (private sector) media has several problems. The most prominent is financial and lack of access to information. Nevertheless, most of these private sector

outlets have found their way to get ads, while in terms of information, because of the political situation and the involvement of the KRG authorities being corrupt with the Iraqi government, they hide information continuously.

In order to develop, the independent media has to work on promoting its funding sources and to look for new techniques for marketing, so as not to succumb to any political party. Besides, it should make more effort to get access to information and should not be biased to any party for any reason. Another point is that journalists of the independent media should rely on moral and trade promotion so they can get more audiences.

Response: Question 6: In the Kurdistan region, TVs are the most effective because people, regardless of their age and education levels, watch it and prefer it to other media outlets. Besides, TV is conclusive evidence for events. Meanwhile, radio is popular in Kurdistan because it reaches the rural areas and again people regardless of their education levels listen to it. I think that printed media comes in fourth place in terms of effectiveness. In terms of online journalism, it is true that it is effective and has a high proportion of the audiences, though the internet service is still confined to the cities and we cannot say that all of the people have benefited from it as required.

Response: Question 7: In general, the officials of the political parties provide information to their loyal journalists and media outlets. I think that the relationship is unhealthy because the process of providing information to journalists is based on personal, partisan and political interests. These interests create unhealthy relations and make journalists a tool of the officials for publishing specific information. In this case, journalists lose their real character in spreading the truth to the people. I believe this unhealthy relationship exists in the context of the partisan and shadow media.

Response: Question 8: No doubt, until now, there was no regulation of access to information. Therefore, the independent media has resorted to leaked information because the KRG and the political parties' bodies have not provided information to the journalists. We have several examples of this situation, such as the case of Karzan kerîm, who was detained because of the leaking of information. Besides, most of the officials when talking to the journalists provide information, and requests for anonymity, which is another obstacle to the media. Overall, cooperation is not as required because the officials do not provide information formally and most of their information is linked to their political conflicts.

Response: Question 9: The most prominent journalists' criticisms of the authorities are hiding information, insulting and torturing journalists and the KRG's neglect in its responsibility to protect journalists' safety. Whereas the authorities' criticisms of media outlets are related to the leaking of information because revealing the truth about some cases, especially oil and corruption in Kurdistan, is considered a headache to the authorities. In the meantime, I think that the officials have no criticism of their loyal media outlets, though officials from a specific political party may have criticism of the outlets of a rival party.

Response: Question 12: First of all, we have to realize that the parties' affiliated media does not seek all types of information. For example, they do not criticize the subject of oil and other sensitive topics of the KRG and the political parties; therefore, they do not face problems. On the other hand, the independent media outlets, which work for revealing necessary information to the people, are the most vulnerable to impediments.

No doubt, a part of the violation against the media relates to financial rights. The affiliated media to the political parties is funded by their parties, while the independent media has been deprived of such funding. On the other hand, the partisan media outlets have been deprived of the right of freedom of speech since they are committed to a specific ideology and policy, while in contrast the independent media outlets exercise this right. When it comes to comparisons, overall the independent media outlets are more vulnerable to violation because they always attempt to have access to various types of information, consequently we see that most of the journalists who face insulting, impediment and threats are those who work for the independent media. There are plenty of examples of this, such as burning the head office of *NRT TV*, *Dengî Xellk* radio (the voice of the people) in Sulaymaniyah and other outlets of the opposition parties, such as the office of TV and radio of Gorran (change) movement in Erbil, TV and radio offices of the KIU in Dhok city.

Response: Question 15: The most prominent obstacle to journalists in the Kurdistan region is non-implementation of the presswork law No. 35. This law guarantees journalists' rights of access to information and to cover all events and activities and anyone who impedes or insults them should be punished legally. Nevertheless, in the Kurdistan region when journalists try to access information, they face many barriers from political officials and the security forces in the form of threats and even target killings. The executive and other powers in Kurdistan, have not implemented the press law, which means they do not care about journalists' rights.

Each of us as a journalist has tried to conduct or write many news reports; though because of lack of information we could not do this. Another important point is that gaining information is the cornerstone of media work and any barrier to this means the collapse of the real goal of transferring the truth.

The problems of the media are on several levels. For example, some of the problems are related to the media outlets themselves in their dealings with the journalists and others are related to the KRG. According to the presswork, journalists should not be expelled or prevented from conducting their work and they should be rewarded if they conduct further work, though the response of the media outlets and foundations in Kurdistan to this point is not as required. On the other hand, the problems relating to the government are not implementing the regulations, lack of information and recording too many lawsuits against journalists to make a heavy burden on them. Besides, some of the problems of the media come from the political parties.

Additionally, the media itself has many problems, such as lack of professionalism, lack of legal awareness, ethical problems and others.

Response: Question 16: Instead of regulating their freedom and allowing journalists to experience their rights in conducting their duties, there have been attempts to censor the media and there is evidence of this. The religious sanctities law draft was one of these attempts to censor the media and there were several instructions and decisions for cracking down on freedom of speech. For example, one of the public prosecution's instructions confirmed that insulting any religion or national symbols should be subject to legal action. Besides, the presswork law is not implemented in the courts: therefore, we see that almost 1000 journalists have faced violations in one year. In terms of the law of access to information, because it is new, therefore, it is early to talk about it, but I think some of its articles pose a threat on access to information.

Response: Question 20: No, they are not fair. Most of the courts in the Kurdistan region are dealt with through Iraqi old penal law instead of the Presswork law of Kurdistan No. 35. To illustrate, since 2009 when some reports about the budget in Kurdistan were broadcast on KNN TV, lawsuits against several journalists were unresolved until now. Moreover, in the case of killing Serdeşt Osman and detaining Karzan Kerîm and others, the courts were not fair. Meanwhile, usually the courts impose big fines on the journalists or decide to imprison them.

Response: Question 22: The existing quantum of freedom of speech in Kurdistan is in fact the media's gain. Although the journalists in Kurdistan, especially those who work for the independent media outlets have rocked the powerful, it has not been able to be the fourth estate.

Questions about online journalism in the Kurdistan region

Response: Question 23: The internet is fast and affordable, therefore, websites have significant impact and they been able to gather a large number of audiences. Besides, many websites have links to the live broadcasting of TV, radios and have online versions of the printed newspapers and magazines. This has facilitated the access of audiences to all media outlet types.

Response: Question 25: Yes, certainly. Online journalism in Kurdistan has developed in terms of design, quality, and fast publishing of news and in terms of joining the traditional and new media together. The development of online journalism has occurred because of the improvement in the Internet and a realization of the importance of the websites for the media foundations.

Response: Question 27: Many printed newspapers have closed worldwide because of the financial crisis, though I do not think this will happen in Kurdistan because the internet services and online journalism are still new for people. Another point relates to the high proportion of literate people in addition to the fact that each traditional media outlet has its own characteristics that make it difficult for people to abandon them.

Response: Question 28: Certainly, it has a negative impact. Because of political intervention, there is a lack of balance in online journalism since some of the online news sites, which are not part of a known media foundation, are unidentified and anonymous and operate for political reasons. On the other hand, the online sites that operate within the framework of a TV, radio or printed outlet, are to some extent sober, though they use the same editing style of these outlets, which is a professional defect.

Response: Question 29: In terms of the technical aspect, I have no information. Most of the online sites operate in Europe or elsewhere abroad, so they are far from accountability. On the other hand, usually those online sites, which operate independently and are not part of a media foundation, are indifferent. Besides, some people write without a sense of responsibility, which is a serious problem. We have to remember Serdeşt Osman, who was killed after he published an article on the *Kurdistanpost.com* website and Karzan Kerîm who was detained because he published an article online.

Response: Question 30: So far, there is no law for regulating online journalism and I hope that does not exist because I'm afraid of censoring it.

Response: Question 32: Censorship is in different styles. It usually is in the form of self-censorship, Institutional, political and external pressures. Sometimes we see some articles or news stories that are deleted in some online news sites as a response to satisfying political parties.

Response: Question 33: In Kurdistan, the media situation is the same for all of the types. However, those websites that have no known ownership, address, and publish everything, attempt to avoid their responsibility for what they publish through a phrase, which says, the articles that are published on our website do not reflect our opinion. I think this is not right morally and professionally.

Response: Question 37: In terms of the writing language, I think online journalism has had a negative impact and has made the situation even worse and created chaos. This is because of the lack of professionalism and unfamiliarity with the linguistic principles. Nevertheless, it has helped many Kurdish for teaching their children the Kurdish language.

Questions about the role of online journalism in the freedom of expression and democracy in the Kurdistan region

Response: Question 38: Online journalism has had a significant and broad impact on creating public opinion. Many of the media foundations prefer to publish some of their news stories in their online newspapers instead of their TV channels or printed newspapers.

Response: Question 39: Certainly, online journalism has had a broad and significant impact on promoting freedom of speech in Kurdistan over the past years and it has become a link between the Kurds in Kurdistan and in the diaspora. As I mentioned, what is not allowed to be published in the traditional media outlets, is published in

online sites. Online sites have a substantial role and they are incomparable with the traditional media outlets in promoting freedom of expression.

Response: Question 41: All online news sites should be professional, accurate, take account of journalistic ethics and take legal standards into consideration, be fast in posting the latest news and finally, they should not let personal moods decide on publishing reports and articles.

Response: Question 42: In the previous period, there was an ethical contract among some of the media foundations to make a space for the public to exchange their views and opinions. This has had an important role in expanding freedom of expression.

Response: Question 43: Yes, certainly, online journalism has been able to play a role in the decision-making process. The people follow up the subjects on the online news sites and they express their opinions, and this eventually makes a sort of social and ideological debate, which I believe will influence the decisions.

Response: Question 44: The social networking websites have an effective role on the freedom of expression and democracy. The online news sites also resort to these social websites to spread their news widely, and articles even more and in order to reach audiences as soon as possible. Besides, these social websites as they have a large number of users, they attract the officials and politicians to spread their statements and views on these websites. In terms of freedom of expression, it is obvious that they have played a significant role worldwide and in Kurdistan also.

Response: Question 45: Yes, certainly they have an impact because these social websites are a centre for people to meet and to exchange their ideas and opinions. For example, there have been many campaigns started on these websites and these have led to gathering people in reality.

Response: Question 46: Both of them are very important, have influence, and have their own features. Nowadays, the social websites have become an important and a wide media centre because everyone has a private page and account in these websites.

Appendix 6.10: transcript of interview with Sara Qadir Lecturer at media department of Sulaymaniyah University and journalist at Awêne newspaper

2-9-2013

General questions about the media in the Kurdistan region

Response: Question 4: In my opinion, the independent media is more credible. Even if some of the non-partisan TV channels in Kurdistan are not completely independent, they broadcast reports that are interesting for the people, therefore, people are convinced by these channels rather than the partisan channels. In terms of popularity, certainly the independent media has bigger audiences. Nevertheless, there should be scientific and unbiased polls to know about this point.

Response: Question 5: Yes, independent media exists. *Hawllatî* and *Awêne* are independent newspapers and were capable of unveiling many problems, corruption and many others. For example, this media has informed people that public budget is a right of the people, but monopolized by some senior officials and the KRG, and it must be placed in the public treasury. Certainly, the independent or private media outlets have played the role of the fourth estate and they have been able to inform people about their rights before parliament does.

In my opinion, an independent media should be independent financially and its journalists should be independent ideologically so they can report and talk about any party. Besides, the journalists should not have any weak points so the officials can misuse them.

We can say that the private sector media (independent) constitutes mainly the printed outlets and it started with the printed publications such as *Hawllatî*, *Awêne* and then *Lvîn*. Nowadays, there are many private online newspapers. Besides, we can consider NRT TV as an independent outlet, although there are officials behind it. In terms of the radio station, Radio Nawa is one of the radio stations that has been able to bring pressure in the past.

The most prominent problems of the independent media are lack of access to information and lack of budget. Many of the journalists who work in such media have modest incomes or work as volunteers.

For developing, the independent media needs advertisements, however, the problem is that in our country, the market is monopolized and most of the businesspeople prefer to save their money. The advertisement has not become an important part of people's thinking, therefore, it is not widespread. Comparing the huge amounts of commercial goods and the many companies that have entered Kurdistan, advertisements are very few because the public's understanding of advertisements' importance is very limited.

Response: Question 6: The TV stations are the most influential because its audio and video, and can reach into every home.

Response: Question 7: I think the relationship is not healthy. The officials have many secrets and they do not want journalists to know about [them]. Therefore, if a journalist has a strong link to an official, I put a question mark on him and on his work, because such a relationship may lead to common interests and make the journalist turn a blind eye to the official's defects. Such journalists, who are mercenary, mainly exist in the shadow media; they work only for their own interests and have neglected the interests of the public.

Response: Question 8: Yes, since we do not have enough sources of information, we can say that some of the officials through private relations have become a source of news for journalists. Besides, many of the officials have conflicts with each other and try to hurt others, therefore, they have become a good source against each other.

In my opinion, even if the journalists have strong links with the officials, their conscience is the best basis for creating a proper and healthy relationship between them. Besides, journalists should resist any temptations from the officials.

Response: Question 9: The lack of access to information from the government departments is one of the journalists' criticisms. It is obvious that some of the departments have privacy, though subjects like public budget, health, drinking water, oil and food are public issues that everyone has a right to know about. On the other hand, the officials claim that the journalists are distorting the facts in their own favour and violate this privacy.

Response: Question 12: Journalists of the partisan media have more access to information than journalists of the independent media have if they want, but the fact is that they do not care. On the other hand, journalists of the independent media resort to many ways to gain access to information. For example, sometimes I pretended to be an employee or an ordinary citizen so I can get some information in a private hospital or a government department about particular subjects. I know this is improper and against journalism's principles, but I knew if I revealed my identity, they would never let me in. Sometimes, the work of independent media's journalists looks like spying, but they have to do it because it serves public interest. Therefore, it is difficult for journalists of this type of media to have access to information and in the meantime, they are more vulnerable to violations because they are taking risks in their work.

Response: Question 15: The main problem is that the ruling parties are monopolising the market of government and commercial ads. The majority of the large companies are owned either by the political parties or senior officials who basically assert that the ads go to their own or loyal media outlets depriving the independent media of ads, which accordingly puts the independent media in a critical financial situation. In my opinion, these problems have affected the performance of the journalists. For improving the situation of journalism, first of all, the KRG should be a government of all and should be open to the journalists, because even if the government do not support the independent media financially, at least it should provide them with information. Access to information is very important, because even if a media outlet has no funding source, it can gain a large number of audiences and in this case, it increases its circulation and gets more income through sales and advertisements. In general, providing information and allowing freedom of speech is vital for improving the independent media.

Response: Question 16: These laws are dual-use by the KRG. If the authorities wanted to punish, detain and fine a journalist, they resort to the Iraqi old penal law. Even if they used the law of Presswork No. 35, they can misuse it as well because it has many elastic clauses.

I think these laws have no role in regulating the media and a good example of this is violations against the journalists. On the other hand, I have not heard that any online site has been prosecuted because of a violation of the law.

Response: Question 20: No, I do not think so, because our judges are not independent and the courts are dominated by the political parties, therefore, they cannot deal fairly with lawsuits of the media. A good example is the case of the journalist Asos Herdî, where the court hearing was closed because the prime minister was involved in the lawsuit and the verdict was imprisonment suspended for 6 months.

Response: Question 22: It is true that there is a plurality of opinions and parties in the Kurdistan region, which are the principles of democracy, but I personally do not believe in this democracy too much, because it is a different style of democracy and I cannot define it. If we count freedom of expression of the people, this is mainly due to the role of media.

In some times, this media has been able to be the fourth estate and has caused pressures because it has unveiled many hidden issues.

Questions about online journalism in the Kurdistan region

Response: Question 23: As the internet is affordable and we cannot avoid the evolution of the world, therefore, certainly it has played a role in developing mass media and serving people because it is the basis of websites and has facilitated access to information. In terms of the benefits, the internet has facilitated journalists' access to information and to post whatever they want, often without any censorship or pressure. It is true that this makes chaos at the beginning as is happening with Facebook, which has become a place for making our community and culture valueless, though in the meantime, valuable things are also posted on the internet.

Response: Question 25: Certainly, online journalism has developed. A good example is that a herd of people is working in these websites as journalists and now we can transcend the borders through online media.

Response: Question 27: No, I do not think so. If this was true for developed countries, it is not for our society because most of our audiences are barely literate. Therefore, dealing with online journalism is probably not easy for them. Besides, mobile phones that are used for browsing the internet are not affordable for all.

Response: Question 28: I think the online news sites do not post everything as in Facebook because they have their own standards and principles, therefore we cannot say that they have violated the values. For more improvements, online journalism should consider ethical values. Besides, they should be supported financially and to have access to information.

Response: Question 29: Certainly, they face both technical and professional obstacles. For example, many online news sites have faced hacking threats, and their journalists complain of a lack of information and they may face threats.

Response: Question 30: We have no special law for online journalism, which is a weak point of the Kurdish media. The problem is that most of the ethical violations take

place through online media, but we have no law to deal with that despite it becoming a popular media outlet.

Response: Question 32: In the Kurdistan region, there is censorship on all types of media, including online, but fortunately, it looks like most of the officials have not enough time for reading. Besides, in our country, there is law only for the printed media but not for online, however, the authority may create pressures or threats on the online news sites through other laws.

For overcoming this censorship, I think there should be a special law because there is chaos in online journalism and it is widely used for defaming people, whereas this is illegal in the printed media according to the law.

Response: Question 33: Censorship in the traditional media is more than online.

Response: Question 37: If it has influence on the Kurds in the diaspora, then it influences the culture, but we cannot say that it has that impact. Online journalism is not that influential on the political discourse.

Questions about the role of online journalism with the freedom of expression and democracy in the Kurdistan region

Response: Question 38: Because online journalism helps those who have not enough access to information, to be aware, therefore, it has an impact but it is not significant.

Response: Question 39: Because there is not a lot of pressure in online journalism and it is not subjected to any law, therefore, people are able to write for online journalism much freer. People can say their words and express their opinions freely in online journalism.

Response: Question 41: There should be filtration for the materials that are published on the online news sites to avoid libel and defamation. I think such filtration will not limit freedom of speech if it was not based on personal moods, but relied on a set of principles and ethical values that journalists cannot avoid. Besides, when journalists say that the public budget has been looted, they should have evidence. The problem of online news sites is that instead of talking objectivity, they talk personally, which is not acceptable.

Response: Question 42: Yes, it has been able but not evenly, because there is a bias in that. For example, if I want to conduct academic research, I cannot rely on the results of the polls and comments on online news sites.

Response: Question 43: Not too much, because online journalism has not that much impact and cannot create pressures as much as printed media and TV can.

Response: Question 44: I have a bad opinion of the social networking websites. Through these websites, people can realize to what extent the cultural and educational level of the individuals is low. In most societies of the Middle East, these social websites are used to defame and insult. It is true that a part of society uses these websites properly for spreading information and their opinions, but in general they are used improperly and this shows the illiteracy of our society.

Certainly, the social websites have an impact on the freedom of expression because people can say and post whatever they want without any criteria or censorship, however, in my opinion this is not freedom of speech.

Response: Question 45: They do not affect the decision-making process, what they do is create public opinion. For example, for insulting a politician or a party, sometimes there will be a kind of consensus on Facebook, which may lead to a virtual or non-real beforehand opinion and eventually this does make an impact.

Response: Question 46: I think what is published on the social websites is not freedom of expression. These websites may have provided an opportunity for some people to talk. The online news sites are different and each of them has its own principles and may not allow people to say everything, therefore, in general, we can say that the social websites have provided more opportunity for freedom of expression since everyone can say whatever they want.

Appendix 6.11: transcript of interview with Serdar Muḥemed Editor-in- chief of *Awêne* newspaper

17-7-2013

General questions about the media in the Kurdistan region

Response: Question 4: In my opinion, each type of media has its own problems. For example, the ruling parties' affiliated media outlets have made a herd of journalists only for covering the awful mistakes and defects of the ruling parties. Likewise, the opposition media has not been able to conduct its functions professionally because it has a political goal and agenda. Similarly, the independent media has its problems and sometimes makes mistakes. In general, I think there are defects in the Kurdish media, but to an extent, the media of the ruling parties has not been able to be credible, and in second place, comes the opposition media.

The independent media outlets, which are not working for a specific ideology, have more audiences. Overall, in Kurdistan the independent media has more audiences despite the fact that the ruling parties circulate some of their newspapers and magazines for free, such as *Hewlêr* (Erbil) newspaper and *Gullan* magazine.

Response: Question 5: In my opinion, the independent media should have an independent finance source with no red lines and should be able to operate professionally and independently.

This media exists. For example, *Awêne* newspaper is an independent newspaper, which has tried to be credible, unbiased and to stand the same distance from the conflicting parties. I think this newspaper has been successful because it was able to preserve its independence in the elections over the past years.

In Kurdistan, TVs are the most popular and have the biggest audiences. People spend their daily time watching TV. I think independent TVs are very rare, we can say that

NRT TV makes an effort in this direction, though the independent media mainly are printed media and online news sites.

The key problem of the independent media is that its financial potential is too limited because it mainly relies on sales and advertisements, which are in a steady decline and since the independent media is mostly printed, its sales have declined and consequently its advertisements have also declined, therefore, its financial profits have dropped. Another problem is lack of access to information. I think it is difficult for the independent media outlets to get information and they mainly rely on personal relationships. Moreover, recently because of the lack of salaries, journalists from the independent media have started to leave in favour of those media channels that provide high salaries. I believe this is a part of the authority's plans against the independent media.

For developing independent media, I think parliament should approve a law for supporting this media. With regard to the independent media outlets themselves, they should review their work style and especially the printed media, which constitutes the greater part of the independent media, should change its classic style so it can compete with the TV and the online news sites, which currently have the scoops.

Response: Question 6: I think TV is the most effective media outlet, which is able to guide public opinion. One of the reasons is that most of the Kurdish people are illiterate. Besides, it reaches the audiences easily and people spend many hours in the evenings and daytime watching TV.

Response: Question 7: Since there is no constant democratic system in Kurdistan, therefore, the relationship is personal and private. Both journalists and officials in their relationships try to preserve and guarantee their own interests. I think this is one of the problems of media in general and independent media in particular, because such a relationship makes journalists turn a blind eye to the many defects of the officials.

Response: Question 8: Yes, they covertly provide journalists with information. If the law of access to information was implemented properly, it would help the media outlets provide their audiences with more information. For the present, lack of information is one of the problems. For example, no one knows about the income of the Ministry of Natural Resources and its deals with oil companies and even the minister of the finance does not know how much the salary of the president is. In Kurdistan, access to information is too difficult and this constitutes a serious problem for the media.

Response: Question 9: There is a kind of sensitivity between the authorities and the journalists. Journalists criticize authority because of lack of access to information and because the officials do not give statements. To illustrate, many European, Turkish, and Arabic newspapers have interviewed the prime minister of the KRG many times over the past five years, but he is not ready to talk to the local press. Besides, journalists complain about the violation against them during conducting their duties by police officers, security forces and other government bodies. On the other hand, the authority thinks that the journalists are not professional and magnify the problems.

Response: Question 12: Journalists of the ruling parties' affiliated media are more accessible to information. For example, the former Prime Minister Berhem Salî has an online news site called *Xendan.org*. When Salî was the prime minister, this website always had a scoop concerning news of the new government employments and it was always publishing lists of the new KRG employees. This made this website popular and so it gained more audiences. Therefore, we can say that such media outlets can easily get information.

Not only in terms of the standard of living and salary, but it is also different in terms of safety. For example, Asos Herdî was beaten because of his work. Meanwhile, the authorities' affiliated journalists get expensive gifts, high salaries and other privileges and their safety is guaranteed, while the independent media's journalists are subject to violation and even target killings.

Response: Question 15: In addition to the financial problems and lack of access to information, there is a kind of pressure and threat to the independent media from the partisan media and others. For example, when a journalist from an independent outlet tries to follow up a sensitive subject, he/she may face barriers and we in *Awêne* newspaper have seen many such cases. To illustrate, in the prison of Koye city, there were violations and assaults against some prisoners and one of our reporters investigated this subject, but later he faced many problems and threats and he even had to leave his home for a while. Such problems may not face journalists from the ruling parties' media since they do not follow up such violation and corruption.

In my opinion, there should be an active law for regulating access to information and funding those independent media outlets that are sober and have a high proportion of readers and circulations. Such a law should be approved by parliament and the KRG should deal with journalists equally and guarantee a secure life for them.

Response: Question 16: In both ways: legally and illegal, the authorities have tried to narrow the media's free work and control freedom of speech. Sometimes, some regulations are issued only for narrowing freedoms such as the law of the sanctities. On the other hand, sometimes they illegally try to limit the freedom of media work such as what happened to Asos Herdî when a senior official sent a couple of his bodyguards to beat him up.

Some of the regulations are good, for example, the law of access to information, though the problem is not implementing them properly.

Response: Question 20: According to my knowledge and the KJS's reports, the courts in Sulaymaniyah deal with the media lawsuits through the Presswork law No. 35, while In Erbil they use the Iraqi old penal law. In general, I do not blame the courts for this defect because the political power have created this situation and use the courts to silence journalists and narrow freedom.

Response: Question 22: It has not been able to become the fourth estate, though it has affected the democratic process in Kurdistan from developing.

Questions about online journalism in the Kurdistan region

Response: Question 23: We can talk about the internet in two aspects. First, the internet has become a part of the competition since it is considered a media outlet and has made the proportion of the printed media's audiences decline. The other aspect is positive, where it has facilitated access to information and publishing.

Response: Question 25: It is too difficult to claim that we have a professional and developed media in the Kurdistan region. Not only for online, but this is the reality for all types of media, TV, radio and printed. All of these are in dilemma and have problems, however, there are efforts to overcome these problems.

Response: Question 27: It has had a significant impact, but the printed media is not over yet. Online journalism has affected the printed media's circulation. For example, prior to the development of the internet and online journalism in Kurdistan, we in *Hawlatî* and then in *Awêne* newspaper had a 12-14 thousand circulation, whereas now because of online journalism this number has declined dramatically.

Response: Question 28: We have to distinguish between the online news sites. Some of them have become a mess, while others try to be professional and sober. Nevertheless, in general, if we look at online journalism and the social networking websites, we see that they provide a large area of freedom of speech and sometimes this will be at the expense of the journalism's professionalism and sobriety.

I believe even if there was a law for online journalism, it would not have an impact on improving it, because it is not like traditional media that can be controlled easily through laws or barriers. It mainly depends on the online newspapers themselves so they can be improved.

Response: Question 29: According to my knowledge, *Awêne.com* online news site has some problems, but not at the level that exists in the printed media, because printed media is more known and public.

Response: Question 30: Online journalism is dealt with through other media laws, but according to my knowledge, there were efforts to issue a special law for online journalism and for TV also.

Response: Question 32: Sometimes some known and public online news sites face lawsuits. In online journalism, the journalists should be self-censored. I think this kind of censorship exists in online journalism.

Response: Question 33: The printed media is conclusive proof and has its own law and standards. The authorities also care about it more than the online. This has made prosecution of the printed media easier than online.

Response: Question 37: We have many problems, especially in terms of language. The absence of a unified writing language is one of the problems of both the printed and the online versions of *Awêne* newspaper. To illustrate, the printed *Awêne* newspaper only circulates in Sulaymaniyah, Erbil and Kirkuk while it does not reach Dhok because we have the problem of language. Likewise, there are many good newspapers circulating in Dhok but the people in the other cities have not heard about them. This means that the media has not been able to contribute in creating a unified and common Kurdish writing language. To a small extent only, online journalism has had an

impact. For example, sometimes we browse some of the websites that are run by the Kurds of Northern Kurdistan or those that operate from Europe in Latin Alphabetic. This has made a kind of understanding, though this has not helped in creating a common and standard Kurdish writing language.

Questions about the role of online journalism with freedom of expression and democracy in the Kurdistan region

Response: Question 38: Although online news sites have an impact to an extent, they have their own problems. The fact is that until now TVs are most popular because a high proportion of the Kurdish population are illiterate and the TV can broadcast and spread its messages easily. Overall, online journalism has had an impact, but to a limited extent. Besides, the other point is that most of the websites that are browsed by Kurdish audiences operate from outside of Kurdistan and this is a problem.

Response: Question 39: To a good extent, they have had impact because they have provided a better opportunity for talking, expressing and exchanging opinions. I think the Internet, to a high extent, has served various voices and colours all over the world not only in Kurdistan. The Internet has enabled displaying many thoughts with different views instead of one view. Moreover, if the traditional media outlets do not provide news or information about particular subjects, people will resort to the online sites.

Response: Question 41: Information transportation is very important because it leads to an increase in people's awareness, though one of the problems of these online news sites is that they do not provide enough information about politics, economics or social aspects to the audience. In my opinion, one of the problems in Kurdistan is that there is no online site that provides economic information to people. Whereas most of the famous newspapers in the world have devoted a special section to the economy, though over the years the priority of the Kurdish media was mainly politics.

Response: Question 42: In my opinion, these polls are superficial because none of them expresses the true opinion or the reality of Kurdish society. Nevertheless, in general the internet has provided a better opportunity for the people's contribution in expressing their opinions. Both the online news sites and the social networking websites have made freedom of speech uncontrollable.

Response: Question 43: According to my knowledge, the online news sites have not been able to play an effective role because there is chaos in online media and this has underestimated its role. I believe that until now the TV and printed media have had an impact and not online media.

Response: Question 44: The social networking websites have had significant effects. For example, previously it was difficult for people to publish their views and opinions, whereas now, because of social networking websites, all people can easily and quickly post footages, photos and texts and to express their opinion. They provide great opportunities for freedom of speech and even for revealing events. For example, if the events of 17th of Feb. 2011 had happened prior to the emergence of these social

websites, no one would know anything about them, but because of the social websites, everyone saw what happened.

Response: Question 45: To an extent, they have had an impact on creating public opinion, but in Kurdish society, these websites are not able to play a significant role in creating public opinion because they have problems. Nevertheless, we can say that among the youths they have had an impact. In terms of the decision-making process, they have not had significant impact and they have not helped the people to influence the decision-making process.

Response: Question 46: In my opinion, because the social networking websites do not limit freedom of expression, therefore, they are more influential than the online news sites. Besides, the majority of the people now have their own accounts on Facebook and there is a widespread controversy about Facebook. In addition, the users always check their accounts. Therefore, the social websites have provided more space for freedom of expression for the people .

Appendix 6.12: transcript of interview with Şwan Muḥemed AFP correspondent and director of the *Spee* (white) Company for media training, which publishes *Spee* magazine and operates *speemedia* news website (speemedia.com)

1-8-2013

General questions about the media in the Kurdistan region

Response: Question 4: It depends on the media outlet. I think if the private sector media outlets, which all have a different style of work, were able to regulate themselves and operate professionally and maintain a balance, I believe that in this case they could play a good role. Nevertheless, so far, they cannot play this role perfectly and at many times some of the independent media have become a part of the opposition style, which is a defect.

Certainly, the independent (private sector) media has an audience bigger than other types of media.

Response: Question 5: Certainly, it exists. The independent media emerged when *Hawlatî* newspaper was issued in 2000. This media has tried to have an independent speech and financing source, preserving a balance and to be a bridge between the two administrations in the Kurdistan region in the early 2000s. I believe that this media has been able to implement journalistic principles. I do not deny that sometimes, even the partisan media has operated according to journalistic principles, but the problem is that this type of media is not trusted. It is true that sometimes the independent media has been rough with some societal or political persons or groups, but at least it is not guided by the political parties.

Independent media is media that has a humanitarian and independent speech and financing, trying to be committed to the ethical standards.

One of the problems of the independent media is lack of funding. This problem is mainly related to the decline of sales, to illustrate, five years ago, the printed media was dependant on sales, while now it relies on the ads. The printed media is suffering from a declining circulation, for example, before I quit *Awêne* newspaper, its sales were only 3000, while in the past, sometimes its sales were up to 17000. Other printed media outlets have the same problem. Another problem is that our businesspeople still prefer to advertise in the printed media rather than online, whereas it is obvious that online media has much bigger audiences. Besides, some of those who own the private sector media channels cannot absorb the new changes in online and social media. We should familiarize Kurdish journalists with the developments of the western media. This should be implemented on the media supervisors and directors. If we want to make changes, all media types, independent, shadow and partisan should adopt a strategic plan and their supervisors should participate in it, because if only ordinary journalists participate, there will be no changes.

Response: Question 6: In the early stages, until the downfall of Saddam Hussain's regime, the printed media, especially the independent newspapers and magazines had significant impact. Then satellite TVs were established, which are now in competition with online journalism. I believe that the future is for online media, but the satellite TVs will also remain influential. It is true that the printed media has declined because of online journalism, though printed media has benefited from online as well, for example, if in the past the printed newspapers were circulated only in one country or one city, now they transcend borders and reach everywhere in the world. I think the future is for online media, but other types of media will renew themselves.

Response: Question 7: For example, the laws of Access to Information and Presswork No. 35 are not active and they have no role in regulating this relationship, in contrast, the personal interests are the basis of the relationship. It is true that both laws, Access to Information and Presswork have some defects, but they are proper laws compared to other journalistic laws in the area. For example, the law of Presswork has prevented journalists from being detained because of their work and has facilitated their access to information. The law of Access to Information is also in favour of the journalists. Nevertheless, the problem is that the judicial system cannot absorb these new laws, therefore, they are not effective.

Response: Question 8: Certainly, they do, but it is not systematic, because the interests and relationships play a role in this. For example, when an official provides information to a journalist, it is not because he believes in the principles of journalism, it is because of his conflicts, or he wants to leak some information for his own favour. In the meantime, some officials are open-minded and supportive of the media. Likewise, we have political parties that are completely closed, but we also have some open-minded people in other parties, who deal with media properly. For regulating the relationship between the journalists and the authorities, I suggest implementing the existing laws properly.

Response: Question 9: When a crisis faces Kurdistan, the journalists are always the first victims. In Kurdistan, there are many powers, some of them are legal and others are not. The illegal powers, which are over the government institutions and carrying guns, often deal improperly with the journalists and they do not hesitate to insult or kidnap journalists. On the other hand, some of the violations come from government bodies, for instance, sometimes journalists are victims of the security forces of *Asaish* (security) or partisan officials, whereas according to the law, they are not allowed to deal with the journalists and only the courts and police departments are allowed to deal with journalism cases. If the laws and the decisions that are approved by parliament and the KRG are implemented properly, I believe this will decline the violations to an extent, but in the elections and demonstrations, the journalists are always the victim of the violations.

Some criticism of the officials is that journalists do not deliver information faithfully and they are biased. They also claim that some of the media outlets and their journalists are affiliated to a party or a senior official. I believe that the journalists in Kurdistan are able to preserve a sort of balance and independency so they can be credible.

Response: Question 12: It depends. Journalists of the independent media are more accessible to some specific sources and information. While some news and sources, which serve a political purpose, may be more available for partisan journalists. In terms of violating rights, the independent media are always the victim, though I do not deny that even some political parties' affiliated journalists are also victims. For example, during the demonstrations of 2011, journalists of the political parties were facing many problems, because at that time the Kurdistan region was divided into two fronts, opposition and ruling parties. On one hand, the journalists of the ruling parties were facing problems from the opposition parties and on the other hand, journalists of the opposition and independent media were facing problems from internal security forces.

Response: Question 15: First, we can say that our media is not professional. Second, so far, we could not absorb and technically exploit the evolution of new media technology in our favour.

Certainly, there are pressures on journalism and they come from many sources such as the political parties, government departments, companies and sometimes from social figures. These pressures have affected the performance of the journalists through making a kind of self-censorship, which has made them hesitate in saying everything.

One of the solutions is activating our courts and the judges should absorb the importance of journalistic work. Unfortunately, our courts are not active as required and there are lots of media lawsuits that have not been resolved after 6 or 7 years. For example, 7 years ago, there was a lawsuit against me when I was the editor in chief of *Awêne* newspaper, until now this lawsuit has not been resolved. This delay in resolving these cases, takes our time and our energy. Besides, until recently, the courts were using the Iraqi old penal law in dealing with media cases.

Response: Question 16: The law of Presswork is to some extent active, because some courts, especially in Sulaymaniyah province, have started implementing it, but in some other areas, so far it has not implemented perfectly. The law of Preventing the Misuse of Mobile phones and the Internet has not had any influence on the media, but it has had an impact on the social aspect. Moreover, the law of Access to Information, still has not been entered into force. I believe, these laws have helped in regulating mass media to a certain level, and they have not caused limitations for the freedom of speech. Maybe in the future with the development of society, they will create some barriers and constraints, whereas for now they have a positive impact on journalistic work.

Response: Question 20: No, the courts of Kurdistan are not fair and the politicians and the officials dominate them, therefore, they are not fair in dealing with the journalists. For example, when there are lawsuits against journalists, they are questioned and even detained if they do not attend the trial, whereas when the officials go to court, they are questioned respectfully while they drink tea.

Response: Question 22: Certainly, it has a role in promoting democracy through talking about protecting human rights, reforming the political system, creating public opinion and the existence of different opinions, but I think it still needs much time to become the fourth estate. It might have been able to become the fourth estate at sometime, but it still cannot make basic changes to the political system in our country.

Questions about online journalism in the Kurdistan region

Response: Question 23: Certainly, it has plenty of benefits. In terms of politics, the internet has enabled the Kurds from everywhere to be in touch with what is going on in Kurdistan and culturally also it has had benefits. Moreover, the internet has introduced Kurdish local newspapers to the world; showing various opinions from abroad and in addition in Kurdistan creating interaction between them. To illustrate, if in the past, an article or report was published about the Kurdish dilemma in a foreign newspaper or magazine, it was too difficult for the Kurdish media to reach them, but now, thanks to the internet, which has facilitated this and has made interaction between the events in Kurdistan and abroad much easier.

Response: Question 25: The development is horizontal not vertical, in number and not in quality. The reasons for this are too many, such as the lack of professionalism, the lack of understanding of the importance of online journalism and the lack of an economic vision to make online journalism a profit medium.

Response: Question 27: I believe that the traditional media renews itself and will alter its style of work. To a certain extent, the development of online journalism will have a negative impact on the traditional media, but it will also have a positive impact, especially as it will make the old-fashioned media outlets alter their styles.

Response: Question 28: This is not a problem only for online journalism; it is traditional media's problem too. I think, this is related to the level of understanding media rather than the online or printed media themselves, since the same defects in the printed media exist in online media, because the journalists who work in online

media have come from the printed media. In general, we do not have specialist journalists in online journalism. Therefore, whoever works in this type of media has come from printed media and has the same problems.

Response: Question 29: The problems and threats in traditional media are much more than in online journalism, but in general, there are too many problems. One of the problems is technical, because so far the scientific capability in Kurdistan is not as good as is needed to exploit this new media technology properly. Legally, I think online journalism is less vulnerable to lawsuits than traditional media, because online news sites are able to modify, correct and even remove content and mistakes at any time, while in printed media as an example, the articles and other journalistic material will remain.

In my opinion, we should overcome our current academic mentality. Besides, another problem is that our media is political and we have no media for a social life, economic and other aspects, therefore, we have two defects, one is the academic and scientific aspect and the other is that our journalists are not well connected to the people.

Response: Question 30: So far, there is no special law for online journalism and the other laws deal with it. One of the defects of the law of Presswork No. 35 is that it does not deal with online journalism. Even the publication law of 1993, only dealt with the printed media. I think this problem is not specific to the Kurdish media, it is global.

Response: Question 32: In terms of the technical aspect, I do not feel that there is censorship although sometimes some satellite TV channels claim that they have faced jamming, which I do not believe. In terms of professional censorship, no doubt the censorship that exists on the other media types from society also exists in online journalism. These censorships are political, social, religious and sexual. I think in our society, political, religious and social censorship exists on all types of media outlets, but there is no technical censorship.

Response: Question 33: In my opinion, the mentality of our society and the courts is still the mentality of the printed and traditional media; therefore, so far censorship on the traditional media is much more than on online media.

Response: Question 37: The Kurdish language is in an awful situation in all aspects including media and political sectors since the Kurdish government and the specialist institutions do not want to work on creating a standard language on the nation's level, whereas they usually work on expanding the local dialects instead. Accordingly, this is reflected in media whether printed, online or broadcast. Therefore, in my opinion online journalism has no role in improving the Kurdish language, because this process needs a national project and a set of regulations that we should be committed to. All efforts of the Kurdish media in this direction are personal effort, which do not have any basis. Nevertheless, online journalism has benefited the political aspect to a good extent.

Questions about the role of online journalism in the freedom of expression and democracy in the Kurdistan region

Response: Question 38: Nowadays, it has an impact in creating public opinion, especially among the youths. According to my information, among 4.75 million of the Kurdistan region's population, almost half a million are using the internet and the vast majority of them are youths, while the adults and elders may use the internet once or twice per week. Therefore, this will have a significant impact on the freedom of speech, diversity of opinions and debating. In fact, because of the social networking websites, all of the people in Kurdistan contribute in the media and they have enabled ordinary citizens to make contact with officials, intellectuals and journalists.

Response: Question 39: Certainly, it has an impact. For example, in the past our printed newspapers and magazines, were only circulated in a specific area, which was the Kurdistan region, while now because of online journalism, there are many online news sites that are browsed in other parts of Kurdistan and in Europe. In fact, because of online journalism, a national democratic thought is about to be created in the media and then it will enter the political centres. It has had an impact on the freedom of speech, but we have to notice that the political midst has not absorbed this so far.

Response: Question 41: First of all, online media is new, therefore, we need to make it academic and our people should learn how to deal with this new media. I believe that in the Kurdistan region, which is a part of a developing country, it is necessary for the online news sites to work together as a group and to cooperate through exchanging information so they can create public opinion.

Response: Question 42: Their effect is limited, because so far, the officials and the journalists have not absorbed the comments and opinions of the people and sometimes there will be reactions to that. I think we should overcome this phase and normally accept and absorb all comments and opinions that publish on the online sites and the social websites. I think, the comments on online journalism have not been absorbed and the news websites only to a certain extent have allowed the comments and people's contributions, because they are afraid. In our country, there is a fear of democracy and the entity of the people. Therefore, online news sites are controlled and many improper comments are removed because they contain comments which defame and libel against the writers who write to these online news sites.

Response: Question 43: I think it makes an influence gradually, but it is not as required. Besides, it is changing from one stage to another, for example, in a certain stage the printed media had an impact in Kurdistan, while now, I believe satellite TVs are capable of creating public opinion in a very short time and directly. Nevertheless, probably, after ten years online journalism may play this role.

Response: Question 44: If in the past only a group of the intellectuals and journalists were able to criticize and show notices about the political and ruling system and the officials, now because of these social networking websites, all citizens spread their criticisms, notices and suggestions about various issues. Therefore, through these social networking websites, daily we can see the production of public opinion on a particular subject. To illustrate, currently there is a kind of consensus about the pensions of parliament members and other senior officials. The social networking

websites have influenced even the social aspects, for example, during Ramadan, many recommendations spread on these websites, which urge people to eat healthy foods, how to remove a bad smell from the mouth and many others. Therefore, the social networking websites have played a significant role in guiding people and in vital aspects of their life.

Response: Question 45: Yes, certainly, they have influence. For example, during the demonstrations of 17th Feb. 2011, Facebook played a noticeable role in guiding people. In terms of decision-making, so far, its influence is limited, but on the social aspect, it has influence.

Response: Question 46: Certainly, the online news sites are more effective, but the social networking websites are more active, because the online news sites are not open to everyone, they are run by journalists, they are known and more professional than the social websites. Besides, they only publish writers' articles and provide specific types of information.

Appendix 6.13: transcript of interview with Sîrwan Xerîb Eħmed Editor- in-chief of *Xendan.org* news website

17-7-2013

General questions about the media in the Kurdistan region

Response: Question 4: In the Kurdistan region, the independent media outlets such as *Hawllatî* and *Awêne* come first, but at the present, they are in a steady decline in terms of credibility because the opposition parties have seriously affected them. No doubt, the outlet is credible when it does not become a part of the event and works for providing citizens with information. I want to point out that according to the *Alexa.com* website and Google, our online news site *Xendan.org* is in constant evolution and month by month its audience increases. This has made our website credible and even then there are not any lawsuits against us because we work professionally.

Response: Question 5: It exists, but only a few and they have not been able to convince people that they are an independent media, because they have become part of the event in Kurdistan and the influence of the opposition parties on them is very serious. Therefore, I think that the independent media is in a steady decline.

The most prominent obstacle to the independent media is financing. This financial problem has led to the inability of private sector media channels for hiring adequate staff and journalists with experience, accordingly most whom work in the private media sector are beginner volunteers or have low salaries, which eventually has created a lack of professionalism. The second problem is the lack of a strategic plan for the future. They have no economic plan for sustainability. Therefore, after a short time of circulation, the independent media newspapers have to close down. For example, when *Hawllatî* launched, after circulating 17 issues of the newspaper, it went bankrupt. The same thing happened to *Awêne* after circulating 200 issues. This means

that they have no projects and plans for the future. It is true that the printed newspapers rely on the sales and ads, but they should have other commercial projects for their sustainability. Another problem is the lack of an active law to facilitate journalists' access to information.

Response: Question 6: In the aftermath of 2011, the internet became affordable for all in the Kurdistan region and this has made people deal with online news sites more broadly. I believe that the online sites have a significant impact because it spreads information faster than TV, radio or printed media. Besides, all online news sites have accounts on Facebook therefore, they are becoming broader and influencing people even more. Nowadays, the internet is affordable for everyone and providing this service has become a competition, therefore, it is influential and even caused a significant decline of the printed media's circulation.

Response: Question 7: Unfortunately, there is a very negative phenomenon in the Kurdistan region, which it is the unhealthy relationship between journalists and the officials. This relationship established was based on mutual interests and not on professional purposes.

Response: Question 8: The ruling parties conceal information because so far, the law of Access to Information is not effective. For example, the PUK or KDP, do not allow spreading of any information unless it is in their favour. My suggestion is that there should be workshops to raise awareness among journalists and officials for clarifying the importance of journalism, allowing access to information and raising people's awareness. The officials should understand all these and in the meantime, the political parties should support journalism through providing information. As public awareness increases, their political participation increases, and this will help democracy and the secular parties and vice versa.

Response: Question 9: The journalists criticize the officials for being non-transparent, non-democratic and concealing information about corruption. On the other hand, the officials' criticism is that media outlets have dropped to the level that they interfere with the privacy of the people, which has made a sort of collision. Overall, lack of access to information and transparency are prominent problems in our country, which has made many journalists resort to improper ways, such as libel and defamation and there is no active law to regulate this situation.

Response: Question 12: Certainly, those journalists who are close to the political power are more accessible to that information that the power elite want spreading. Sometimes, journalists use their private sources to access sensitive information about oil, corruption and the negotiations on the Kurdish disputed areas, however, the power elite prevents them from this.

During the events, when police officers see some people burning and destroying public properties, they become hysterical, hence they do not differentiate between anyone. In such events, the police or security forces beat everyone from the opposition, ruling parties and independent media. For example, the records of Metro Centre for protecting journalists, show that even journalists of the ruling parties' media, were

beaten, but since the journalists of the opposition parties and independent media try to cover most violations during the events, therefore, their rights are violated more than others.

Response: Question 15: The pressures are in different forms. Sometimes, the pressure is psychological. To illustrate, if a journalist has a government job and writes an article about the corruption of a particular ruling party, he faces psychological pressures. Besides, sometimes the pressure comes through threats by mobile phone or email. I believe that the leadership of the political parties are not behind such pressures directly, though, since they have no clear vision of freedom of expression, there will be a violation by the parties' members.

The problems are lack of an active law for access to information equally to all partisan and private sector media outlets, lack of training courses for the journalists and threats. For example, when journalists of *Hawlatî* or *Awêne* newspapers leave their work and go to work for other outlets, these newspapers resort to hire inexperienced journalists, who need training. I believe that there should be ongoing training courses to prepare journalists before they start working for a media outlet, but unfortunately, in Kurdistan, everyone can work as a journalist and there is no system for training them properly.

Response: Question 16: All of the laws related to media are good, but none of them has regulated the media because they are not in effect. Even the laws that guarantee freedom of speech are not implemented in the courts. They have made chaos because they are not implemented and this means the absence of these laws. This makes the journalists work according to their mood.

Response: Question 20: It depends on the judges, but since there is no explicit law, they resort to the use of the old law, which we, as journalists, believe is a violation. Besides, the law of the presswork of Kurdistan No.35 is elastic and most of the judges deal with journalists according to their moods.

Response: Question 22: Freedom of expression is a part of democracy. All of the ruling, opposition and private sector media outlets have broadly helped the people in Kurdistan to say their words, however, allowing people to say everything, has created chaos and tensions more than supporting democracy. Therefore, the political power of our country should not allow this chaos to prevail the political climate as well.

Questions about online journalism in the Kurdistan region

Response: Question 23: In the past, until 2004, the reporters used to send their news through classic mail or landlines, but now they send their photos, footages and texts to their channels very fast through the internet. Besides, the internet has accelerated journalism and has created online media, which provides news and information to audiences very fast. Accordingly, it has also accelerated people's lives.

Response: Question 25: Compared to 2003, it is very sophisticated. Besides, journalists' awareness is heading towards online journalism because the internet is affordable and people's standard of living has improved.

Response: Question 26 and 27: I believe in five years, printed media in Kurdistan will disappear. The printed media is heading towards extinction. In my opinion, if the bestselling newspaper in Kurdistan was selling for example, six copies, now it sells only three copies.

Response: Question 28: No, I think it depends on the online news sites and we have no count of the unknown websites. The absence of a law or even a moral agreement for regulating online journalism in Kurdistan has created chaos and a sort of lack of professionalism.

Response: Question 29: Yes, there are threats. To illustrate, sometimes, our online news site faces hacking attempts, but we do not know if they come from an official body, political party or hackers from other countries. For instance, only this year there were more than 150 attempts to hack Xendan.org.

Response: Question 30: There is no special law for online journalism and usually it is dealt with through other laws.

Response: Question 32: Yes, there is censorship, especially from the political powers. Journalists of online journalism face threats, humiliations and impediments. Besides, the officials do not have enough knowledge about online journalism and they only recognize TV and printed media therefore sometimes hesitate in dealing with the online news sites.

Response: Question 33: I think censorship on the online news sites is more than in traditional media, because sometimes the officials hesitate in dealing with the online news sites.

Response: Question 37: It has not had a good role, because we have no unified writing language and this shows in our chaotic language. Currently, each online news site has its own style of writing, for example, Xendan.org, NRT, PUKmedia.com and others have different styles of writing. This has not helped in creating a unified writing language. Therefore, we can say that online journalism has a negative impact on the Kurdish language. However, I think creating a unified language is the duty of specialist foundations because media cannot do so. On the other hand, online journalism has an impact on the Kurdish common speech. For example, when the Iraqi forces of *Dijle* tried to occupy some Kurdish area, the Kurdish media had one common national speech and attitude and it has been able to influence the people.

Questions about the role of online journalism in the freedom of expression and democracy in the Kurdistan region

Response: Question 38: All media types together have been able to create public opinion not only the online media, because so far, TV is influential and most of the people watch it.

Response: Question 39: Largely and to the extent of chaos, online journalism has influenced the freedom of speech. In Kurdistan what is not allowed to be said in the printed media, is allowed to be said in online media because there is no censorship in online journalism.

Response: Question 41: First, online journalism should be away from the chaos. Second, it should not spread wrong news and information because this makes online journalism lose its credibility and accordingly democracy is harmed. Finally, it should be professional in covering the events without bias and show all opinions. Otherwise, it loses its credibility, which makes people retreat from participating in talking about democracy.

Response: Question 42: Through commenting on the articles and news stories, the audiences express their opinions. Currently, *Xendan.org* and many other Kurdish online news sites have provided this opportunity and people can write their comments, however, all of the improper comments, which contain libel, defamation and insults, are removed in *Xendan.org* and other online news sites.

Response: Question 43: Yes, because online media is about to replace the printed media, therefore, most of the writers, journalists and audiences tend to publish their articles, journalistic works or opinions on the online news sites. No doubt, the writers and journalists and other societal groups have an impact on senior officials and the country's policy, therefore, what they publish on the online news sites will influence the power elite. To illustrate, the criticism and the opinions about the extension of the presidential term and the constitution that were published on the online news sites, affected the president of the Kurdistan region and made him publish a message, which was completely different from what people were expecting.

Response: Question 44: They have a significant impact because most of what is published in the Kurdish online news sites such as news, photos and footages are re-published on the social websites. For example, if footage of a parliamentary activity of a western country was published on the social websites, the Kurdish users will make a comparison between this and the Kurdish parliament and may comment on and talk about it on the social websites. Eventually, this influences freedom of speech and democracy positively.

Response: Question 45: To a certain level, it has an impact, because the majority of the Kurdish citizens, especially the youths, are using Facebook where they can publish whatever they want. This has made all the civic organizations and societal groups use Facebook and other social websites for their activities. This has created a broad debate about many subjects on these social networking websites, where people can call for demonstrating and different activities. Nevertheless, the political parties and some societal groups control these social websites, therefore, it is impossible for the people to ignite a revolution as happened in Egypt and Tunisia.

Response: Question 46: Online journalism is more influential because the social websites have lost credibility. For example, in the social websites many users have fake accounts and spread opinions and information anonymously.